

HAPPY 17TH ANNIVERSARY TO US!

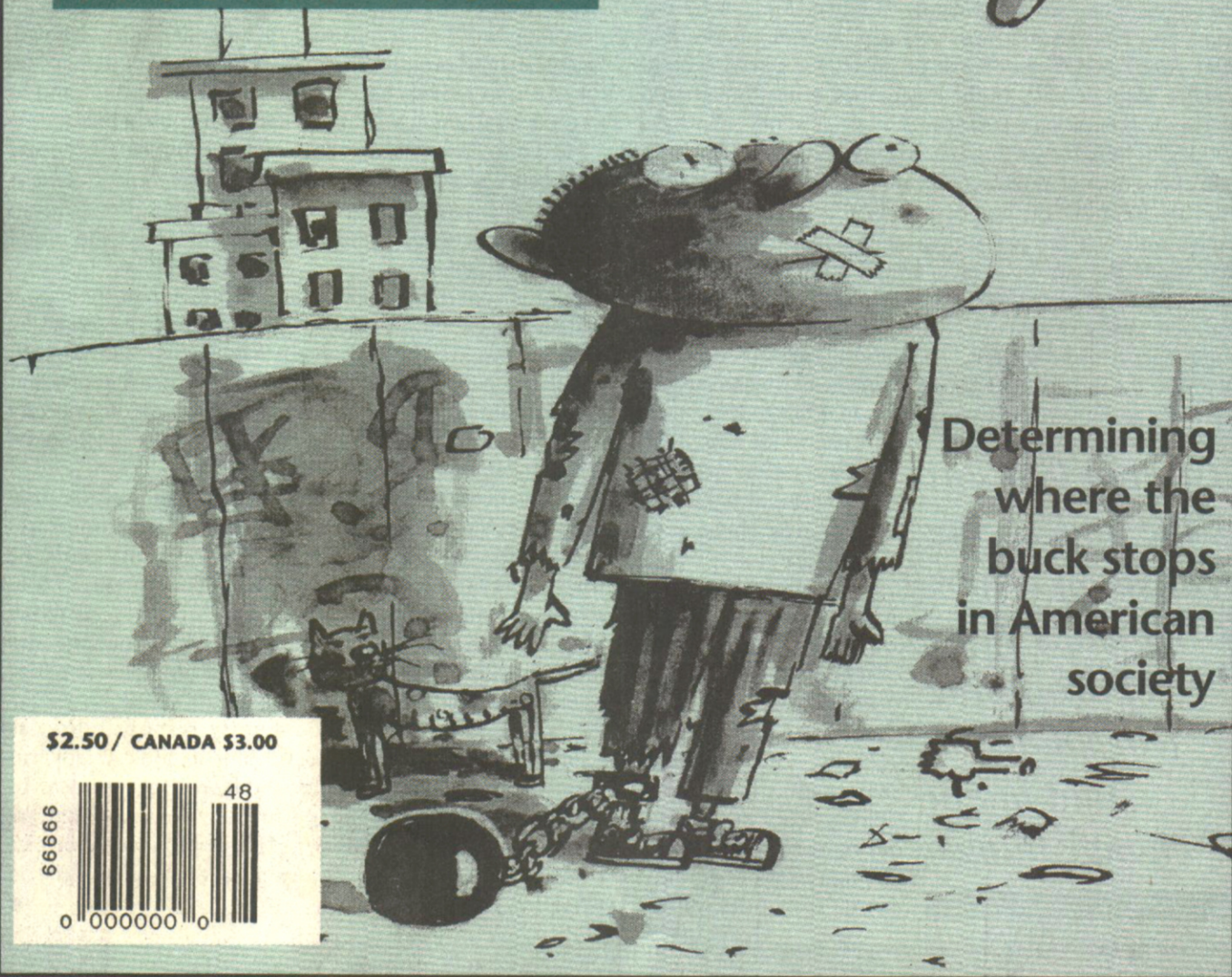
November 29 - December 12, 1993

IN THESE TIMES

the alternative newsmagazine

WHO'S RESPONSIBLE?

SPECIAL ISSUE



Determining
where the
buck stops
in American
society

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EDITORIAL

THE PRESIDENT TAKES A FIRST STEP ON CRIME

Drugs, crime, violence—these are the hot issues for today's politicians. They are also the focus of inner-city community and religious leaders—even gang leaders—who are coming together to try to stop the disregard for human life that has made murder the No. 1 cause of death for men in their 20s.

The extremes of wealth and poverty in our consumer society have created an epidemic of crime. And, of course, crime and violence are most prevalent in communities that offer young people the fewest prospects for a secure, comfortable, dignified life. In the inner cities, crime threatens to destroy a generation of African-American youth who have nothing to look forward to but poverty and disrespect.

In the world of politics, talk about crime has long been used by Republicans and law-and-order Democrats as a euphemistic way of race-baiting—and as a cover for policies that widen the gap between rich and poor. But few politicians address the conditions that create crime. Instead, federal, state and city governments pour massive resources into police agencies and prisons. To stop drug-related crime, for example, the federal government alone has increased spending from \$5 million for two agencies in 1968 to more than

\$13 billion for more than 50 agencies today. Nonetheless, drug-related crime has increased steadily.

Although violent crime has proliferated throughout our society, it has reached truly crisis proportions only in the inner cities. And in recent months, a growing realization that help is not coming from outside has prompted urban leaders of many stripes to submerge their other differ-

ences in an effort to save communities from collapse. Thus the gang summits and the unity conferences—symbolized by the participation of the Revs. Jesse Jackson, Louis Farrakhan and Ben Chavis. (See *In These Times*, April 5 and Nov. 15, 1993.)

This situation has also led President Clinton to take a step toward changing the course of the debate about crime. In his recent Memphis address to a convention of the Church of God in Christ, Clinton implicitly acknowledged the unity efforts and talked about community responsibility. To his credit, Clinton stressed the social conditions that underlie crime and violence. He cited the “breathtaking terms” in which sociologist William Julius Wilson chronicles “how the inner cities of our country

have crumbled as work has disappeared.”

And, he added, he did “not believe [that] we can repair the basic fabric of society until people who are willing to work have work.” Work, he said “organizes life. It gives meaning and self-esteem” to parents. “It gives a role model to children.”

Unfortunately, Clinton combined these heartfelt new words with policy proposals that have nothing to do with providing work or reconstructing the inner cities. Instead, he repeated his proposals to “put another 100,000 police on the street, to provide boot camps instead of prisons” and to pass the largely symbolic Brady handgun-control bill.

He did so for obvious political reasons. But he also apparently believes the conventional wisdom that violent crime is a local issue—and that there's only so much a president can do about it, save using his “bully pulpit” to set the moral tenor of the debate.

But the conventional wisdom is wrong. Given the nature and size of the problem, crime can no longer be solved by local action. We've gone about as far as we can go with police presence and jailings. There's not much more that cities can do on that score, short of cordoning off minority communities. But there is a great deal that the federal government can do.

If half the money that is now being squandered on drug wars were spent on rebuilding inner cities, crime rates would drop like stones. Community residents could be trained and hired to rebuild and staff public schools, to construct and maintain community health centers, to rehab abandoned homes and build new ones, to manage and maintain public housing, and to expand and upgrade parks, libraries and cultural centers.

It's fine to encourage community responsibility, as Clinton did, but it's more important to look at government's responsibility—and for the federal government to take charge of developing and funding programs that are clearly beyond the capabilities of U.S. cities. It would be nice to see Clinton use his “bully pulpit” to urge this on Congress. ◀

*Clinton looks at
the underlying
causes of crime,
but stops short
of proposing
federal action
that might
change things.*

IN THESE TIMES

"...with liberty and justice for all"

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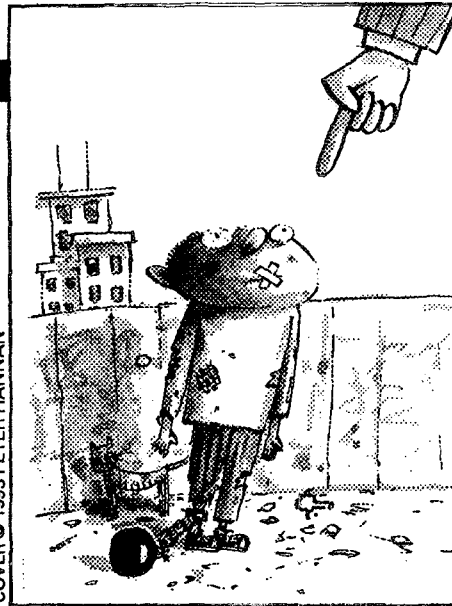


InTHESETIMES

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special section

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LETTERS

"Gangs" are gangs

I am disturbed by Salim Muwakkil's "In Short" reference to Chicago's "so-called" street gangs (Oct. 18). As a former resident and taxi driver in Chicago, I've seen these "so-called" gangs in action. I've paid "so-called" protection money for the right to drive through Cabrini-Green, and have had to scurry for cover from the "so-called" bullets sprayed at random from a "so-called" drive-by shooting as rival organizations fought over turf.

Whatever else the gangs may be, however commendable the political awakening of certain of their members, they are, at base, criminal organizations that terrorize the citizenry in large parts of Chicago. A cynic might venture the opinion that the much-ballyhooed "gang truce movement" is due to these gangs reaching the same conclusion that other criminal organizations reached long ago: beyond a

certain level, mayhem attracts too much attention and is bad for business. Curtailing violence lets them concentrate on their principal fund-raising activity, which is, lest you forget, retailing a highly addictive and toxic drug to children and adults in an already beleaguered community.

In These Times is right to examine official language critically, along with every other part of official reality; your success at doing so warrants my continued support. But sometimes things are "so-called" correctly.

Michael D. Landis
Memphis, Tenn.

Flip side?

Fred Weir ("The guns of October," *ITT*, Oct. 18) is not much bothered by the fact that the U.S. government and mainstream press have

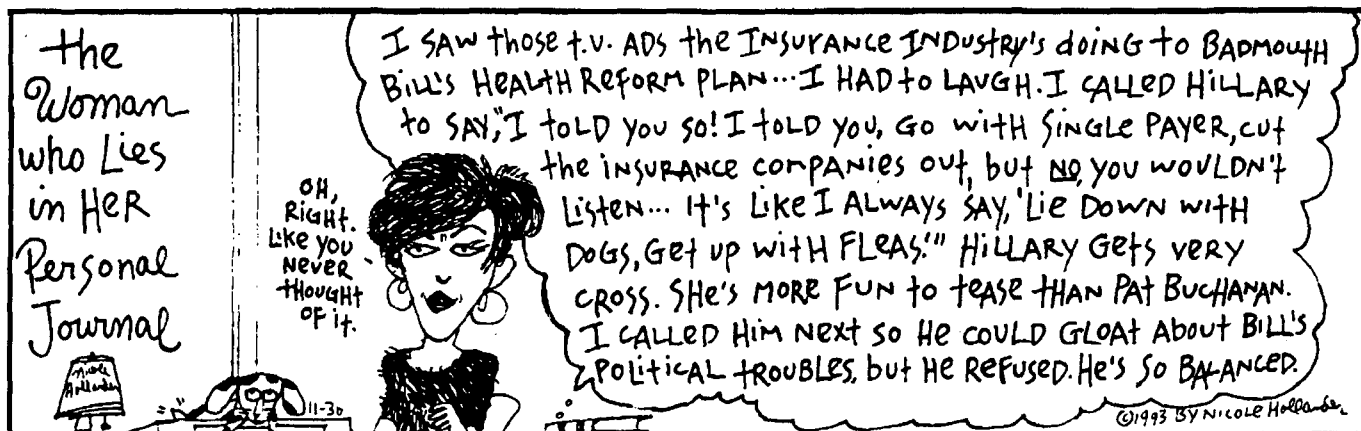
taken sides in Russia's domestic politics. What troubles him is that they have taken the wrong side. So, reversing their color scheme, he paints Yeltsin in disagreeable shades and Yeltsin's opponents in more attractive ones. Serving up politics as a morality play may be important to the mainstreamers to boost their circulation. But what's *ITT*'s excuse?

Without taking sides in Russia's politics, I want to list a few reasons why Weir's article is misinformed. First, the quarantine of the White House began *after* an attack had been launched by its "defenders" during the night of September 22-23 on the defense headquarters of the Commonwealth of Independent States that claimed two lives. It began *after* hundreds of other armed men in paramilitary formations had appeared among those assembled to defend the parliament.

Second, Weir's "storm of gunfire" that "blew away" the possibility for compromise came from those same paramilitary formations, not from Yeltsin's side. They were ordered by Rutskoi and Khasbulatov to attack the mayor's office and TV complex. Those members of parliament still in session when the violence began had just rejected the compromise that their negotiators had worked out with Yeltsin's people, apparently because they had reasons to believe that they would win in a showdown—assurances from the officers' corps and

SYLVIA

by Nicole Hollander



police that their troops would either remain neutral or intervene on parliament's side, plus professions of support for parliament and "president" Rutskoi from most of the leaders of the regions.

Third, the notion that prior to its suspension by Yeltsin on September 21, Russia's constitution "defined a workable division of powers" is deeply mistaken. The legislature amended this constitution at will and for the better part of a year had been steadily amending the presidency out of existence. Its head, Khasbulatov, had been openly proclaiming for six months that this was indeed the main objective of legislative power in Russia. The solution to this crisis last spring was a referendum allowing the voters to break the legislative-executive deadlock. More than three-quarters of them voted to dissolve the parliament, which Yeltsin finally got around to doing five months later.

Finally, what can one say about an analysis of politics that: (1) anchors its explanations in "the character of Yeltsin himself" (five paragraphs to remind readers that bad men do bad things?); (2) recycles preposterous conspiracy theories hatched in Russia's sectarian political circles claiming that police were all but banging their own skulls against the bricks and bottles of 15,000 people rampaging through downtown Moscow in order to lure them into a prearranged trap; and (3) can claim that the parliament—elected while the *nomenklatura* was still the only organized political force in the country—was at any time defending its "social constituencies" against that *nomenklatura*?

Michael Urban
Santa Cruz, Calif.

Fred Weir responds: Given the awesome unanimity of U.S. officialdom and the mainstream media in interpreting Russia's democratic meltdown, it might be a worthwhile exercise to invert it just to see what insights crop up. But that was not my purpose.

The point I argued at some length last July and with more finality in the piece under discussion was that Russia's only functioning democratic experiment in a thousand years was going critical. I search my text in vain for any passages glorifying Rutskoi and Khasbulatov, or suggesting they ought to have "won." The annihilation of one branch of government by another is, in effect, a constitutional coup. If I seem to have come down especially hard on Yeltsin, it's because he is the one who planned and executed such a coup.

I also have trouble finding the five paragraphs in which I'm supposed to have deplored Yeltsin's character, although I admit to quoting my colleague, Jonathan Steele of Britain's Guardian, to that effect.

My own view of Yeltsin, for what it's worth after seven years of observing him during my tenure as a Moscow-based journalist, is that he is not a man of dictatorial instincts but neither does he have much patience for the essential democratic arts of negotiation and compromise. He is at his best leading the charge into a no-holds-barred confrontation.

But Yeltsin's personality is not the historic problem I tried to stress. It is the fact that in moving to dissolve Russia's legally elected parliament, after more than a year of failed opportunities to strike a deal with its centrist majority, he has turned to Russia's enduring bureaucratic-military-security substructures to help him consolidate near-autocratic authority at the center.

No, that's not an exaggeration. In post-October Russia a decree signed by President Yeltsin carries the force of instant law, a power familiar to czars and general secretaries but alien to the democratic project that Gorbachev initiated and Yeltsin swore to expand. Today there is neither parliament nor constitutional court to challenge or revise the storm of decrees issuing from the president's office. Many of them are aimed at altering the socioeconomic character of Russia in ways no future parliament will be able to reverse—should it have the power

(doubtful) or the wish to do so.

The argument that Yeltsin had the moral right to do all this because he won last April's referendum obviously requires scrutiny, since so many shattering actions have since been hung on that slender hook.

Approximately 58 percent of those who voted (37 percent of the total electorate, taking into account the relatively low turnout) answered that they "trust" President Boris Yeltsin. A somewhat slimmer 53 percent of voters endorsed his policies.

A simple majority expressing "trust" might be reason for Yeltsin to feel great for a while, but it hardly amounts to a mandate to seize total power in the country. And if I were Yeltsin, I might worry more about the 63 percent of eligible Russian voters who, one way or another, didn't say that they "trust" him.

Two further questions on that referendum asked Russians whether they were in favor of 1) early elections to parliament and 2) early elections for president. I presume that's what Mr. Urban is referring to when he writes that "three-quarters of them voted to dissolve the parliament."

In the event, of those who voted, approximately 68 percent said Yes to question one, and 51 percent said Yes to question two. Neither proposition won an absolute majority of the total electorate, which the constitutional court had ruled would be necessary to make it legally binding.

But the unavoidable import of that result is that a majority of those who voted wanted new elections to both the legislative and executive branches, not a unilateral disbanding of parliament.

Any effort to find a democratic rationale for what Yeltsin has done is going to put its author beyond our normal criteria for understanding these things. Most justifications I encounter are more or less frankly ideological in their argumentation. And I find it bitterly ironic that once again, for impatient Russian radicals and their foreign cheerleaders, the ends justify the means.

InSHORT



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REAL DEMOCRACY

New Zealand votes to change its voting system

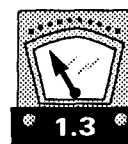
Early in November, New Zealanders voted 54 percent to 46 percent to change their country's electoral system. Gone is the old winner-take-all voting structure. It has been replaced by what is known as a "mixed-member proportional" (MMP) system. This method of electing governments is similar to that used in Germany and to what was recently adopted in Japan. (See "The First Stone," Sept. 16, 1992.)



By Woody Igou

A devolving science

A Swedish newspaper gave \$1,250 each to five stock analysts and a chimpanzee to test who could make the most money on the market in a one-month period.



The chimp, Ola, who made his choice of purchases by throwing darts at the names of companies listed on the Stockholm Exchange, won the competition. Working for Ross Perot must have sharpened his forecasting skills.

Idiom idiocy

An intoxicated German tourist was jailed for more than nine months in a U.S. federal prison for allegedly making a bomb threat during a trans-Atlantic flight. When telling the stewardess that he



had to use the restroom and was "going to explode," the stewardess notified the captain and the tourist was arrested for making a false bomb threat. A U.S. District Court judge, who is fluent in German, released the man after deciphering the tourist's German idiomatic expression, "blow the tiles off the roof." Why our jails are fuller than his bladder.

Women run over by wolves

Darlene Kincer—who lost an arm and a leg, as well as suffering a miscarriage after her boyfriend ran her over with a car, twice, during a fight—blames herself for the incident. She has sought to drop



charges against her boyfriend, William Powell. Said Kincer: "I've got to admit that it hurts me to lose an arm and a leg, and I can't walk right now, but love don't come around that often. Nobody's perfect." *Stand by your man, if you can.*

The convict and the man of conviction

Vermont House Speaker Ralph Wright was one of 55 lawmakers in the state to sign



a letter to Texas Gov. Ann Richards protesting that state's possible execution of

Robert Drew. The letter threatens economic sanctions against Texas. But upon hearing that, in response to the letter, Vermont might lose Texas as a place to ship its low-level radioactive waste, Speaker Wright changed his mind. "Take my name off of it," he declared. *Go ahead and execute him—just not in my backyard.*

APPALL-O-METER SCALE

1. Weightless banality
2. Green Acres stupid
3. Malicious cretinism
4. Howard Sternesque
5. Mary Matalin mean
6. Gangrenous venality
7. A touch of evil
8. A cancer in the Zeitgeist
9. Et tu, Pol Pot?
10. Horseperson of the Apocalypse

Under New Zealand's new system, a voter will have two ballots to cast each time he or she enters the polling booth. The first ballot will elect a representative to Parliament from the district in which the voter lives. About half of the New Zealand Parliament will be elected this way. The other half will be chosen on an at-large ballot from a national list of candidates put forward by the various political parties.

The goal is to come up with a system that maintains the personal accountability of a winner-take-all, single-member structure and at the same time reflects the true makeup of the electorate.

For example, in New Zealand's last election, 99 members of Parliament were elected. And although the Alliance Party, a green-left coalition, received 18 percent of the vote, it elected only two members of Parliament. If that election had been held under the MMP system, the Alliance would have received those two seats elected by winning in single-member districts, and it would have been allotted an additional 16 seats to equal its proportion of the national vote.

This helps to explain why business interests poured money into the campaign to support the status quo. The referendum was the most expensive election in New Zealand's history, with the winner-take-all advocates outspending those supporting a change 10 to 1. But the Alliance Party and other MMP supporters organized a strong grass-roots campaign to counteract the power of the dollar.

Cynthia Terrell is vice president of the Center for Voting and Democracy, a Washington-based group that supports proportional representation schemes such as the MMP. "New Zealand's vote for MMP sends a message to the few remaining winner-take-all democracies in the world," she says. "We simply can't afford voting systems that deprive so many citizens of an effective voice in politics. We can't afford underrepresentation of women, racial and ethnic minorities and smaller parties who add important perspectives on governance. We can't afford voting systems that force leaders to be all things to all people."

—Joel Bleifuss

RETURN TO NORMALCY

The promise and peril of Chile's consensus politics

As Chile prepares for the December 11 presidential and parliamentary elections, the second since the 1988 plebiscite that ended the 16-year Pinochet dictatorship, consensus and moderation prevail. In the 1970 elections,

Salvador Allende became the first democratically elected Socialist president, and land reform and nationalization were on the agenda.

Today, having inherited a booming economy from the dictatorship, Chile's center-left coalition government stresses continuity as much as change. "Little by little we will work to eliminate poverty," promises novelist Isabel Allende, the daughter of the former president, who is running for parliament in one of the poorest zones of rural Chile.

"Twenty years ago, we [the Socialists] were saying that we have to have

radical structural change now. We have to make the revolution now, or else the counterrevolution will come. Now if you stand up and make a radical statement, you stand alone," explains Juan Luis Marré, a Socialist Party member and former leader in the student movement against the dictatorship.

While the 1988 plebiscite and the elections that followed were moments of great hope and uncertainty, December's elections represent a return to normalcy, bereft of the kind of mass mobilization and intense popular participation that helped to bring an end to the dictatorship.

Even the names of the candidates have a familiar ring. Christian Democrat presidential candidate Eduardo Frei—named after his father, who was president during the '60s—expects a landslide victory over the right-wing Arturo Alessandri—whose grandfather of the same name was president in the '20s, and whose uncle, Jorge Alessandri, was president in the early '60s.

Frei is the candidate of the governing center-left Coalition of Parties for Democracy, or *Concertación*. The *Concertación* enjoys a high level of popular support, having overseen a transition to democracy marked by high rates of economic growth and increasing social expenditures.

In contrast to the center-left, the right has been unable to unite around a democratic political vision, and has little to offer in these elections beyond a vague promise to defend the "gains" of the dictatorship.

The question posed by the upcoming elections is whether the *Concertación* will win enough seats in parliament to reform Chile's political system, an inheritance from the years of the dictatorship. The dictatorship's so-called *leyes de amarro*, or "tying-up" laws, were designed to "protect" the government from the people and institutionalize the dictatorship's political and economic policies. The *leyes* include electoral laws that overrepresent the right, force Chile's electorate into a center-oriented two-party pact system, and make it impossible to remove the commanders in chief of the armed forces (including Pinochet himself).

The left enters the elections divided into two camps: those inside and outside the *Concertación*. Since the '30s, the political parties of the left (the Socialist and Communist parties) have united to support one presidential candidate. This time, while the bulk of the left and center-left endorse Frei, the Communist Party and factions of smaller left parties (all outside the *Concertación*) support three different candidates.

Concertación party leaders remain committed to consensus politics, to avoiding the social and political polarization that led to the 1973 coup. Yet voting for Eduardo Frei, a businessman, is too much for some on the left to swallow. A number in the party, including Socialist Ricardo Lagos, have questioned its role as a junior partner in the coalition with the Christian Democrats, and have called for a more oppositional stance—for more democracy, more popular participation, for increased economic growth combined with increasing social equity.

Frei is likely to win the election with substantial popular support. But it remains to be seen how the left parties and social movements will organize to push for further democratization and economic justice—and just how the right will react to the pressure for change.

—Stephanie Rosenfeld

MEDIA BEAT

By Pat Aufderheide

New tech, same stuff

Even without the recent spate of communications megamergers, the info landscape is rapidly shifting. For instance, a company that services 800 and 900 numbers is launching Network One, offering cable viewers programs such as trivia games and contests, with hookups to (surprise!) 800 and 900 numbers. Time-Warner is now leaping into home shopping, via The Catalog Channel, produced with retailer Spiegel. It's also considering a fifth broadcast TV network, even though the new network might compete with the programming that Time-Warner makes for the big three networks.

And as if in direct response to the techno-optimists who expect scientific innovation to solve social problems, Bubble Yum is pioneering virtual reality booths in shopping malls, while the video game company Sega is launching its own interactive cable channel. But the new media age may take some serious selling. Most consumers don't see the need for new, more interactive services that might challenge the computing-impaired. One *Advertising Age* study found that two-thirds of consumers would not be interested in getting "interactive media services" on their home television.

Hyperactive interactive

Of course, some may not know that they already do get some interactive services, like home shopping channels.

Even if viewers aren't aware of the changes, broadcasters are all too aware we aren't in Kansas anymore. As dollars in the business get steadily harder to win, broadcasters are getting ever more creative. One good gambit: host a contest or a call-in show (the one San Francisco TV station does with *Family Feud by Phone*) and then sell the database collected by call-ins to marketers. One enterprising station asked pet owners to mail in pictures of their pets; owners who recognized their own pet when the station aired the picture won a prize. But the station won bigger. Not only did it pick up ads from veterinarians during the promotion, but it sold the 42,000 names and addresses of pet owners it collected to pet-food companies for a dollar a name.

Mortal McCombat

Ronald McDonald and Chester Cheetah have arrived for Christmas. Both McDonald's and Frito-Lay—or, more accurately, their advertising agencies—have designed video games starring their trademarked characters. Video games with built-in product advertising have been done before, but never very successfully until Chester broke through at this time last year.

And by the way...

People for the American Way (2000 M. St. NW, #400, Washington, DC 20036, 202-467-4999) has issued a helpful brochure, "Protecting Artists and Their Work," guiding those dealing with censorship in the arts through legal thickets.

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GREENER DAYS AHEAD?

The battle against chlorines picks up political momentum

The drive to eliminate chlorine and chlorine compounds took a few symbolic steps forward last month, despite foot-dragging by U.S. and Canadian environmental agencies. An expanding body of evidence shows that chlorine compounds, used in everything from pesticides to dry cleaning to plastic, cause human health risks, including birth defects and cancer. (See *In These Times*, October 18, 1993.)

Delegates at the recent convention of the American Public Health Association—whose 50,000 members include doctors, research scientists and public-health-delivery workers—voted overwhelmingly that "there should be a rebuttable presumption that chlorine-containing organic chemicals pose a significant risk" to public health. Such compounds, the delegates declared, should not be used unless they can first be proven safe or if they have no safer alternative.

Another important battle in the chlorine debate came at the biennial meeting of the International Joint Commission (IJC), an official bi-national body that monitors the Great Lakes. In 1991, the IJC had called for a ban on the use of chlorine in industry. This year—at a meeting attended by 1,700 scientists, environmentalists, industry representatives and concerned citizens—an unusually large chemical industry delegation hoped to convince the IJC to reverse its recommendation for a chlorine ban. The IJC commissioner won't make their conclusions available for several months, but it appears that the IJC call for a ban will remain intact. Environmentalists clearly bested industry in the public debate.

The IJC approach to chlorine and other persistent toxics has broken new ground in the environmental debate. The commission recognizes that certain toxics have so saturated the environment that no further discharge should be allowed. Taking a precautionary approach, the IJC has argued that "the weight of evidence," rather than incontrovertible scientific proof of causation, must be the basis of environmental policy, and that chemicals should not be considered innocent until proven guilty, as they are now.

—David Moberg

ROUGH CUTS

By JA Reid



ETC.

By Miles Harvey

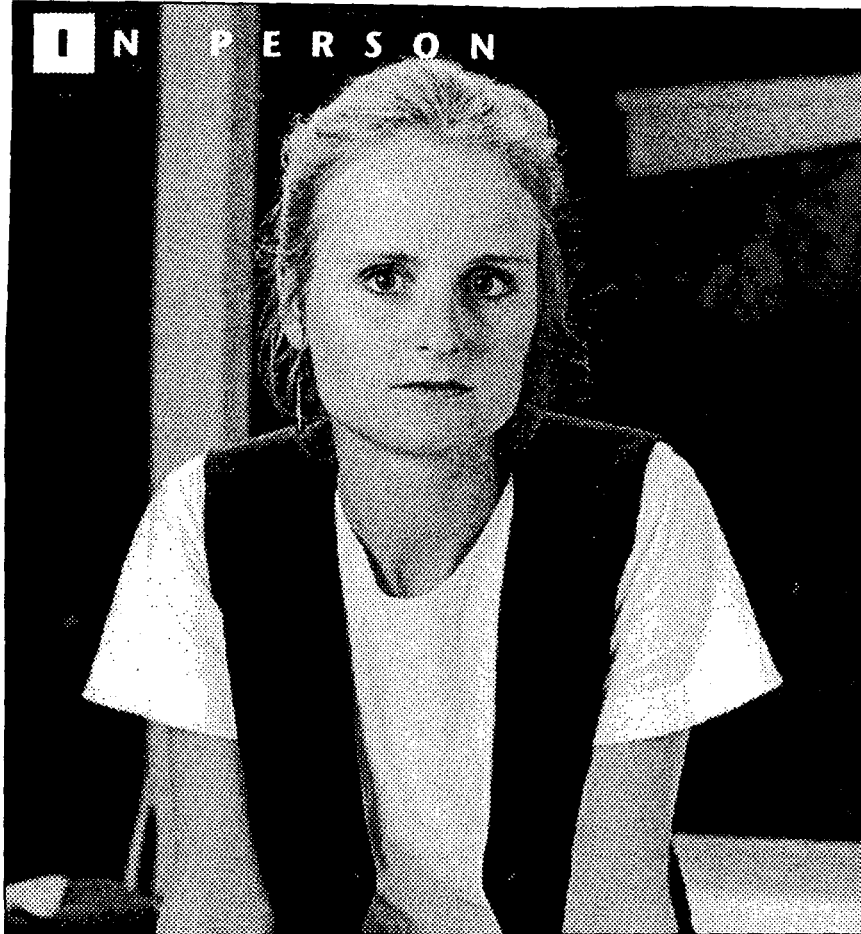
The raid revisited

Did Iraq really plot to assassinate George Bush? Bill Clinton apparently thought so: on June 26 of this year, he ordered 23 Tomahawk missiles fired at Baghdad in retaliation for the alleged assassination attempt. It was Clinton's first act of war. Eight civilians died.

The August 9 edition of *In These Times* offered a close look at the charges of Iraqi complicity in the alleged assassination plot. A story by Patrick Cockburn of Britain's *Independent on Sunday* found very little evidence linking Iraq to the discovery of explosives in Kuwait at the time of Bush's visit this past April. The alleged terrorists were not professional assassins by trade, but liquor smugglers. Cockburn also found that only one of the men claimed to have been involved in a bomb plot—and his story is full of contradictions. Furthermore, there was evidence that Kuwaiti officials had tortured the suspects.

Now Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist Seymour M. Hersh has cast further doubt on the administration's claims of Iraqi complicity. In a story published this month in *The New Yorker*, Hersh argues that "the American government's case against Iraq—as it has been outlined in public, anyway—is seriously flawed."

After the U.S. raid, for example, officials offered photos of a firing device found in the Kuwaiti car bomb and another firing device said to be used by Iraqi forces. "Even an untrained eye can see that these are identical," said



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HEALTH DEFORM

Laurie Abraham takes a street-level look at health care

Over a bowl of soup on a rainy afternoon, Laurie Abraham is bright-eyed and chatty, the picture of good health. Even so, she explains, she was up nearly all night, waiting for a radio talk-show host to call for an on-the-air discussion.

Early this morning she was at a Chicago TV station, readying herself for another interview. She may be tired of talking, but when the conversation turns to health care Abraham grows passionate. "In this country we're having a hard time moving from an entrepreneurial health care system to one that's community-spirited. I understand where self-interest comes from, but isn't it time for people to start caring even a little for other human beings?"

Abraham, 29 years old and Yale-educated, stepped through a cultural looking glass three years ago to find Jackie Banes, an African-American woman roughly her age, living in Chicago's impoverished North Lawndale neighborhood. When Abraham, on assignment for *The Chicago Reporter*, arrived on the scene, Banes was up to her neck in the health care system. As she struggled to support three children on a monthly welfare check of \$414, Banes also cared for her ailing, diabetic grandmother; her father, who'd been disabled by a stroke; and her drug-addicted husband, whose kidneys had failed. Abraham soon found herself mired in the "hodgepodge" of public programs meant to help poor families.

Between 1989 and 1992, Abraham followed the Banes family, as a street-level witness to how a health care system fashioned on Capitol Hill plays itself

Madeleine Albright, the American ambassador to the U.N.

But Hersh talked to seven experts in electrical engineering and bomb forensics, all of whom told him that "the remote-control devices shown in the White House photographs were mass-produced items, commonly used for walkie-talkies and model airplanes and cars. ... [The experts] said there was no conceivable way that the Clinton administration ... could assert that the remote-control devices had been put together by an Iraqi technician."

Those photos were widely republished in the U.S. media. But Hersh notes that before him, no reporters bothered to check with independent experts about what the photos meant. *In These Times* came to a similar conclusion on August 9: "In an informal survey of the country's leading news outlets, [ITT] could find no attempts to independently confirm the administration's charges," we wrote.

Worse, as Hersh points out, in the months before the U.S. raid, the mainstream press helped pressure Clinton into taking action. Leading papers published leaked stories from unnamed officials claiming that "credible" evidence linked Iraq to the alleged plot. Such stories, Hersh discovered, played a role in the easily influenced president's decision.

"When Clinton finally acted ... he was not leading the nation, as was widely assumed and reported, but merely following the path of least bureaucratic and political resistance," concludes Hersh.

out in the "medical wastelands" of urban America. With the national debate over health care reform reaching new rhetorical heights, Abraham offers reformers a cautionary tale with her book, *Mama Might Be Better Off Dead*, published in September by the University of Chicago Press.

The book's title came from the mouth of an exasperated Jackie Banes. Unable to afford care for her suffering grandmother, Cora Jackson, and unable to interpret the complicated eligibility rules for Medicaid and Medicare, Banes grew increasingly frustrated. Her husband and father had a hard time finding any type of steady medical coverage. Her three children grew up under the care of a "Medicaid doctor," who, unbeknownst to the Baneses, had never completed a residency and had failed a peer review for not providing children like Jackie's with appropriate check-ups and immunizations. Jackie was forced to scrimp on her grandmother's medication, since Medicare would not pick up the \$100 per month tab. Ironically, Medicare later paid thousands of dollars to amputate Cora's legs, a procedure that may well have been prevented by adequate medication.

For the last six months of Cora's life, she was hooked up to an elaborate life-support system, plagued by pneumonia, unable to speak. The hospital's intensive efforts to keep Mama alive, for which Medicaid kicked in \$120,000, seem perverse when, as Abraham points out, half that sum could have been used to establish a foot clinic to aggressively prevent amputation in diabetics. She writes, "Perhaps the only time the uninsured have a good chance of getting timely, quality care is when they are damn near death."

The level of disability and illness found in the Banes household may seem startling, but in African-American communities where well over half the population never reaches the age of 65, the situation is nothing unusual. Heart disease, diabetes and high blood pressure are common in these neighborhoods. African-Americans are three times more likely to experience kidney failure, and the amputation rate is twice that of whites. These figures cause insurance companies to shy away from the inner city, says Abraham. "Poor people are patients to avoid. If you had a profit motive, would you want to insure a 21-year-old black guy living in North Lawndale? Hell no. Not only does he have a higher risk of getting shot, which is very expensive, but he's far more likely to have kidney failure before the age of 30."

Even with the Clintons' proposed reforms on the table, Abraham maintains that the poor risk falling through the gaps in the costly, overburdened public aid system. While the reforms do not ignore the poor altogether, they do tend to focus on the middle class, organizing basic health care under the rubric of employers and large managed-care networks, says Abraham. She sees a single-payer system modeled after the Canadian national plan as a possible remedy for the languishing system in place in the United States, and stresses the importance of establishing a guaranteed basic level of health care, overhauling the current Medicaid program and providing the poor with basic caregiving services, as well as with help interpreting the complex skein of eligibility rules for public aid.

Abraham, now a freelance journalist working in New York City, reports that Jackie Banes has taken a job as a teacher's assistant, a move that boosts her pride but heightens the family's vulnerability: because Jackie no longer collects welfare, her children have lost their Medicaid coverage. Abraham concludes, "It's easy to empathize with Clinton's decision to sell health reform by appealing to middle-class self-interest. ... But one hopes that he does not lose sight of those for whom health reform is not mere interest, but a matter of life and death."

—Sara Corbett

T H E F I R S T S T O N E

Rights, responsibilities and the press

By Joel Bleifuss

The mainstream and the alternative press both have responsibilities—the difference is whom they are responsible to. Free of dependence on corporate ads, the alternative press is able to report and investigate areas the mainstream press should, but dares not, go. But where the alternative press leads, the commercial press will follow, at least eventually.

In 1955, when Rosa Parks decided she was too tired to stand up and give her seat on a Montgomery city bus to a white man, a mass movement for racial justice was born. It took a while for the rest of America to catch on.

In the years that followed, other oppressed groups, such as Indians, women, homosexuals and the disabled, began challenging the system and demanding social justice and political equality. Today both the dominant culture and its commercial media recognize that these struggles for individual freedom are legitimate. As a consequence of this evolution, the alternative and mainstream press increasingly converge in how they cover issues of human rights and individual liberties.

Where alternative and mainstream journalists part company these days is in their coverage of property rights. A century ago, muckrakers and socialists waged a battle against child labor. The unfettered right of a corporation to exploit its property, in this case a child's labor, was defended by businessmen and their sponsors in the press.

Similar antediluvian thinking prevails today in the minds of civic leaders who defend corporate property rights as sacred. They justify this idolatrous belief on 19th-century Supreme Court interpretations of the 14th Amendment that defined corporations as persons and granted them the same rights of "due process" and "equal protection."

What is at stake in the property-rights battle is not

ownership, but control. Does a corporation have the right to do what it wants with its property? Broadly speaking, one kind of property is that created by human labor. This would include a steel mill and the profits associated with its operation. Under the current political system, the owner of this property has the right to close it down and shift production overseas. But because the labor movement largely has come to accept the legitimacy of such actions, the key property-rights battle being fought today is not over control of capital but over control of the earth's natural resources.

For example, the modern property-rights advocate would hold that a corporation that owns a forest has the right to cut down as many trees in that forest as it wants. To this kind of thinking, the alternative press must respond: property doesn't have rights, people do. And that is

a truth the mainstream media just does not get.

The commercial press does serve the important, and immensely powerful, role of educating the general public about current events. "Schoolmaster of the People" is the motto inscribed over the entrance to the University of Missouri School of Journalism. But that noble slogan obfuscates the fact that when it comes to the bottom line, the foremost responsibility of the mainstream media is to turn a profit for its corporate owners.

The owners of commercial media generate this profit by allowing other large property owners to rent media space, i.e. to advertise products or political agendas. Consequently, when reporting the news the corporate press has difficulty challenging those large property owners when they abuse and misuse their property. In other words, the mainstream press is a walking conflict of interest.

The commercial media skirts this dilemma by pretending that its responsibility lies in presenting both sides of any story, and then allowing the public to draw its own conclusions. Hogwash. The presentation of any news story involves editorial decisions about what information to put in the article, and, more significantly, what to leave out.

Take the *New York Times'* coverage of the hottest property-rights issue now in the news, the controversy surrounding federal grazing fees. Institutionally, the *Times* takes the commonsensical editorial stand that user fees on federal lands should be raised. However, when the *Times* presents these issues on its news pages, the reporting and editing leave much to be desired. The *Times'* November 10 grazing fee article by John Cushman, for example, fails to report the relevant fact that increased grazing fees will only affect 2 percent of all ranchers, most of which are large corporate or individual ranchers.

Nor does he mention that it is these same corporate and individual ranchers—along with their allies in the mining, forestry, oil and gas industries—that have helped bankroll the election of those U.S. senators, both Republican and Democrat, who are fighting the administration's increase in federal land use fees. Of course, these very same industries also help bankroll the *Times* through their advertising dollars.

The alternative press, when covering public policy debates, has the responsibility to present all the relevant facts, particularly those that indicate who stands to profit and who stands to lose by any change in policy.

If I had been writing that *New York Times* story, I would have added the fact that these fees would affect only the wealthiest ranchers. And my caption under the *Times* photo of four Western senators would have read something like this: "Sen. Pete Domenici (R-NM), speaking at a news conference after the Senate caved in to the filibuster he led against the Clinton administration's effort to raise grazing fees and tighten environmental rules for the private use of public land. Joining Domenici were, from left, Sens. Orrin Hatch (R-UT), Malcolm Wallop (R-WY) and Ben Nighthorse Campbell (D-CO). In the 1989-90 election cycle, these four Western legislators received \$660,000 from the livestock, oil, mining and forestry industries—the same corporate special interests whose welfare they now champion. Domenici alone raked in \$310,000 from these four industry groups, with the largest payment being \$8,500 from Mobil."

Mobil's other political efforts, not coincidentally, include the support of right-wing groups that champion property rights. Mobil, along with a number of other oil companies, helps to fund Accuracy in Media, the right-wing media watch group that warns the country about the clear and present danger of environmentalist "infiltrators" in the mainstream media. Mobil also gives money to the Heritage Foundation, a right-wing think tank that has proposed opening designated federal wilderness to strip mining. Heritage has called upon conservative activists to "strangle the environmental movement," and thereby put an end to "the greatest single threat to the American economy."

Further, Mobil pours money into groups specifically set up to defend corporate property rights from public oversight. According to *The Greenpeace Guide to Anti-Environmental Organizations* (Odonian Press), Mobil helps

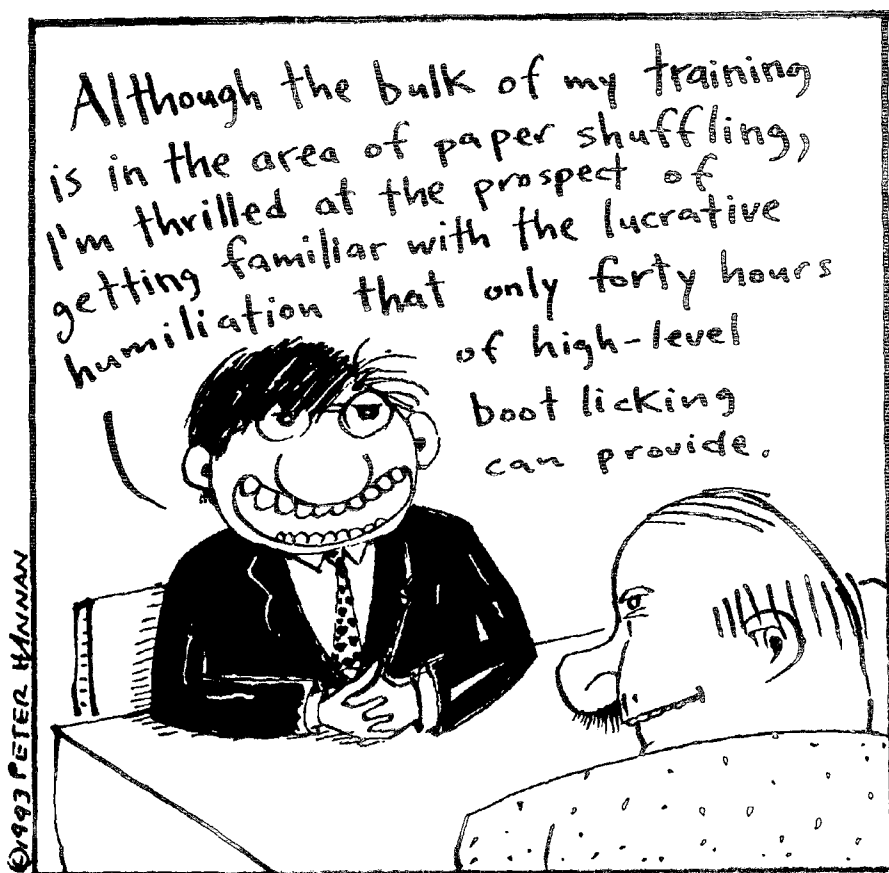
fund Citizens for the Environment, a Washington-based lobbying group that believes environmental problems would be solved if only corporations were deregulated. Mobil also supports the Reason Foundation, a Los Angeles think tank that publishes *Reason* magazine. This foundation, which operates according to the motto "free minds and free markets," characterizes environmentalism as the "the most potent force for reregulation of the economy."

But if, as a *Times* reporter, I were to include this information about Mobil in a story on how corporate America buys congressmen and think tanks, *Times*' owners would no doubt hear from Mobil, which regularly rents the lower right-hand corner of the op-ed page. In addition to keeping the reader mindful of the *Times*' dependence on corporate sponsors like Mobil, leasing this prime advertising space gives Mobil intellectual legitimacy. But who can criticize the *Times* for that? After all, it is just fulfilling its corporate responsibility to make a profit.

The New York Times Company's advertising department would not tell me how much money the Mobil Corporation pays to rent this op-ed space. I was told that information is not public. What is public are the Mobil advertorials that champion corporate America's right to do with its property what it will—and damn the right of citizens to control the quality of life in the world they live. ▲

THE ADVENTURES OF A HUGE MOUTH

by Peter Hannan



WHO'S RESPONSIBLE? 

Surplus values

Progressives need to realize that vague talk of responsibility is not enough to counter the moralistic onslaught from the right.

By David Futrelle

Conservatives talk about values with a certain assurance. When Dan Quayle attacked Murphy Brown's "lifestyle choice," with a straight face and a sonorous tone, he did so in the name of "family, hard work, integrity and personal responsibility." When in the heat of the culture war Rep. William Dannemeyer (R-CA) attacked "obscene" art, he did so, he said, to protect "the Judeo-Christian ethic" from "Hollywood, homosexuals, abortionists, family planners, the sexually promiscuous, failed spouses, failed parents, failed kids" and all other such outgrowths of secular humanism. And when Rush Limbaugh assails the left (and the liberals he takes to be the left) he does so in the name of "those corny old traditional values."

Those on the left are more circumspect in their moralizing. And there are

good reasons for the left to look upon talk of values with suspicion. Talk of morality is divisive; it often has been (and still is) used to stigmatize those who deviate (for good reason or bad) from the confines of convention. Too often, talk of morality and responsibility takes the form of veiled accusation: I am responsible, you are not; I am moral, you are immoral. Such accusations are an affront to the liberal value of tolerance.

While conservatives hesitate not a moment before invoking the gods of decency, responsibility and the like, the left hedges its language, speaking instead of abstract, seemingly objective qualities like justice and equality. But these terms are less abstract and objective than they appear: to speak of justice (and its opposite partner, injustice) we have to have at first made a value judgment, or, rather, a series of value judgments as to what is good and what is bad, what is acceptable and what is unacceptable. The left, no less than the right, engages in a politics of morality (and often, of moralism); but it is a politics that in many ways, and in most cases, hides and

denies its moral content. (Generally, only those whose progressive politics stem from religious conviction are willing to talk explicitly about morality.)

It is no wonder, then, that so many liberals respond with a guilty defensiveness when the subject of "values" comes up. When prominent citizens announce that our society is coming apart at the seams, we can hardly disagree. Yet while we agree with the diagnosis, we look upon the individualistic, symbolic solutions of the moralistic right with a certain dismay. We don't want to stigmatize anyone, to make, say, gays and women the scapegoats for family "decay." And we can hardly, all by ourselves, "rush about revitalizing the family and renewing respect for the law," as historian Robert Wiebe has observed. We're stuck in a bind. "If we respond, we have difficulty knowing where to begin," Wiebe notes. "Yet if we shrug and hide, we invite society to go bankrupt around us."

Given such a distressing possibility, it is hardly a surprise that some liberals (and a few vaguely on the left) have attempted to recapture the language of morality—and, in particular, the language of responsibility—from the right. Some have done so with a notable opportunism—like Bill Clinton, whose appeals to "personal responsibility" during the campaign seemed less an attempt to infuse morality into the political realm as a coded message to white voters that he would be tough with the "underclass."

Others have attempted to work the language of responsibility into a broader, and explicitly progressive, morality. Michael Lerner, the editor of the Jewish left-liberal journal *Tikkun*, argues that progressives need to overcome their resistance to talking the language of moral values. "It is pure



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self-delusion to think that moral values can be kept out of politics," he writes. Indeed, "values [have] already ... entered the public sphere." During the Reagan-Bush years, in fact, "right-wing values were triumphing because liberals refused to enter the debate." Denouncing the Reaganite excesses of individualism and greed, Lerner calls for liberals to "challenge the ethos of selfishness and replace it with an ethos of caring, social responsibility, trust and mutual aid."

This notion of *social* responsibility is, at least in theory, a challenge to the traditional American notion of *individual*

responsibility. Yet liberals have not had a notable success in pushing the debate on responsibility to the left, away from individualism and toward the notion of "mutual aid." In attempting both to adapt to and to challenge the ideological constructs of the right, liberals have found themselves listing considerably (and increasingly) to the right. The notions of social or corporate responsibility—however laudable as ideas—have degenerated into public relations ploys on the part of businesses eager to convince customers that their products and procedures are ecologically and socially "responsible." And when liberals speak, as they increasingly do, of individual responsibility, it is often impossible to distinguish their version from that of the right.

The notion of responsibility is, indeed, burdened with a considerable historical and ideological weight. American popular philosophy has long been rooted in the country's myth of rugged individualism, the ideology of choice for a frontier capitalism. "Every man and woman in society has one big duty. That is, to take care of his or her own self," wrote William Graham Sumner, the economist and Social Darwinist philosopher, in 1883.

The notion of social responsibility, to Sumner, was a contradiction in terms; the redistribution of money from the "fit" to the "unfit," Sumner argued, could only result in disaster. Every dollar given to a beggar,

to "a shiftless and inefficient member of society," was one stolen, in effect, from the hands of the "productive laborer" who would have benefited directly from the dollar's wise investment.

Few these days would put their argument as starkly as Sumner—and few would argue, as he did, that "a drunkard in the gutter is just where he ought to be," on the receiving end of Nature's just retribution. But much of the contemporary discussion of "responsibility"—among the right and even among many liberals—has a distinctly Victorian ring,

combining an old-style moralism (and an equally old-fashioned faith in upward mobility) with the latest in psychological jargon. Discussions of responsibility today, just as they did in Victorian times, tend to turn quickly to the subject of the allegedly "irresponsible" poor.

Well-fed experts on the "underclass" laud each other in the pages of prominent magazines for their supposed courage in restating what has now, once again, become the conventional wisdom: those who are poor are somehow deficient, dysfunctional, different, "undeserving"—in short, irresponsible.

This argument, as historian Jacqueline Jones has suggested, "serves a larger political purpose, for it encourages some people to believe that the poor positively revel in their own misery, that they shun stable marriages and steady employment almost as a matter of perverse principle. According to this view, the poor live in a different country, living a life that is as incomprehensible as it is self-destructive."

We can read, in any number of recent books and articles, exquisite explorations of the supposed "pathologies" of the poor, relying on long-distance psychoanalysis of their "dysfunctions" and "dependency." Taking refuge in a reductive misreading of psychology, the poverty experts present draconian welfare "reforms" as tough love for childlike welfare "dependents." The problem with the poor, in this model, is that we give them too much money; we coddle them and make them weak. If we were to cut off their benefits, they would be able to learn discipline and good character; thus cured of the psychic wounds of "dependency," they too could climb (or claw) their way to the top.

The political implications of the underclass model are apparent enough. *The New Republic*, for example, in its editorial response to the L.A. riots, fell into the classic language of blame-the-victim neoliberalism. "The black underclass perpetuates racial division in this country," the editors confidently announced. "It has helped weaken the American city, speeding up white flight to the suburbs and decreasing the level of black-white geographic contact. When black-white mixing does occur, the powerful image of the black underclass ... has served to stigmatize the vast majority of middle-class blacks, and to powerfully perpetuate the racism of whites." The editors, warming up to the task,

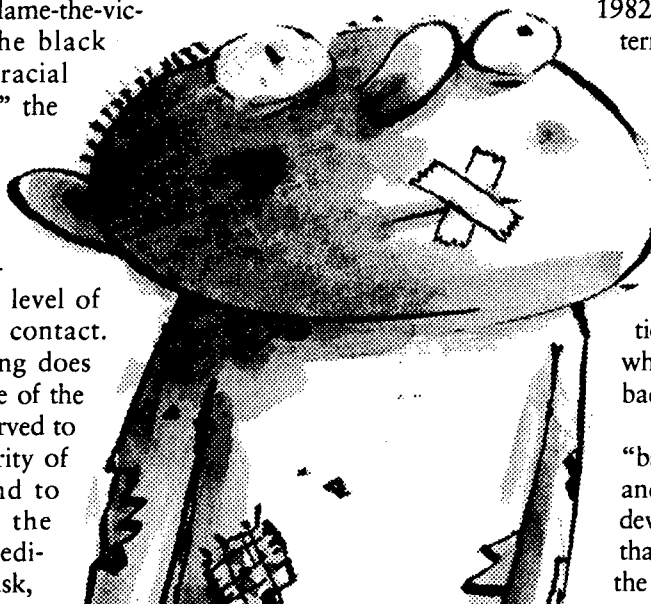
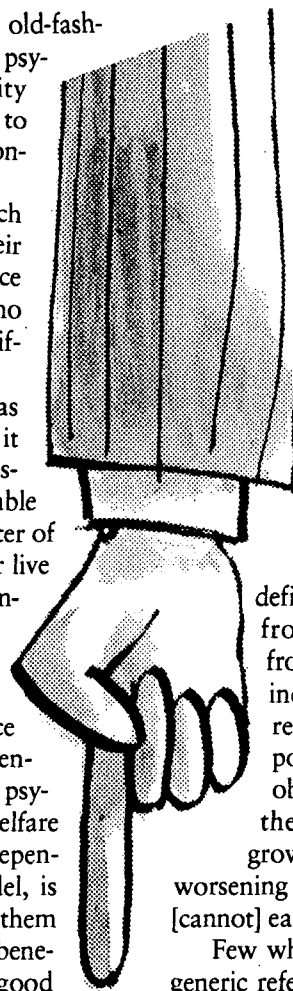
called sternly for politicians to "break underclass culture," to "break through this culture of idleness, poverty, illegitimacy, and crime" by tearing down the welfare system, "the critical sustaining element in the life of the underclass."

This approach has its own internal logic; if you buy its central assumptions these draconian policy suggestions make a certain sense. But since much of the conventional wisdom about the underclass is based less on facts than myths, the stern moralism of *The New Republic* editors (like that of most of those who pontificate most confidently on the subject) is at best irrelevant to the problems of the poor, and in many ways actively harmful.

In reality, the poor suffer not from their own deficient natures, but from a lack of good jobs; from segregation and governmental neglect; from an educational system riddled with savage inequalities. Indeed, poverty today is less the result of "idleness" or "illegitimacy" than of poor wages. In contemporary America, Jones observes, "much of the widening gap between the rich and the poor result[s] not from the growing ranks of the unemployed, but from the worsening relative position of two-parent families that [cannot] earn a living wage."

Few who have adopted the term "underclass"—as a generic reference for the demonized urban black poor—have gone to the trouble of defining the term with any precision. Not surprisingly, there is no real consensus over what, if anything, the term denotes. Some define virtually *all* urban poor people as part of the underclass; others reserve the term for the "deviant" minority of drug sellers, criminals and so on. Journalist Ken Auletta, whose 1982 book *The Underclass* popularized the term, defines the group by its "behavioral deficiencies," as a collection of misfits "operating outside the generally accepted boundaries of society ... set apart by their 'deviant' or anti-social behavior, by their bad habits, not just their poverty." Academic Isabel Sawhill offers a simpler, if somewhat inexact, definition: the underclass consists of "people who engage in bad behavior or a set of bad behaviors."

Aside from the obvious candidates for "bad behavior"—drug dealing, mugging and the like—it has been the putatively deviant family structure of the underclass that has received the most attention from the think-tankers. We have been assured,



over and over again for the last decade or so, that black fathers are "irresponsible" deserters, that similarly "irresponsible" black single mothers produce children at whim (or to increase their AFDC allotment), and that the instability of the black family has led to the social instability of the urban core.

In fact, many of the commonly asserted (and accepted) "facts" about the underclass are at best misleading, and at worst deliberate distortions. Most poor people are white, and poverty is as much rural as urban. Many among the urban poor fit few of the stereotypical characteristics ascribed to the underclass, such as single motherhood and persistent (if not willful) unemployment. As historian Stephanie Coontz points out, the majority of "the persistently poor urban black population ... have one or more of the characteristics usually associated with the 'deserving poor': they are elderly, seriously disabled, or employed for a substantial portion of the year."

Black single mothers have been singled out for special opprobrium, denounced as opportunistic welfare chiselers producing babies for profit. In fact, though the percentage of black households headed by single women is high, and growing, the birthrates for black teenagers, far from spiraling out of control, have actually been *dropping* for the last few decades. And, though poverty pundits are convinced that AFDC payments are a major incentive to out-of-wedlock births, there is no real evidence of this; some researchers have found what appears to be an opposite effect. States with meager welfare benefits (like Mississippi) have high rates of illegitimate births, while those with relatively more generous benefits have lower rates. In fact, as sociologist Mark Rank reports, "welfare mothers" tend to have low fertility rates during the times when they are receiving benefits.

The common remedy proposed by the poverty pundits is simple discipline. In his notorious 1967 report on the "negro family," Daniel Patrick Moynihan suggested that the "utterly masculine world" of military service would provide black men an escape route of sorts from the "disorganized and matrifocal family life in which so many negro youths come of age ... a world run by strong men of unquestioned authority, where discipline, if harsh, is nonetheless orderly and predictable." Aside from the punitive condescension of Moynihan's language—not to mention his sexism—there are a few technical problems with his solution to underclass pathology: studies have shown that military families have higher rates of divorce, drug abuse and family violence than other families.

More generally, poverty pundits turn to work as the salve for underclass indiscipline. Any kind of work will do. Sawhill, for example, sees the unwillingness of the urban poor "to take a low-paid job" as a key example of underclass pathology. *New Republic* senior editor Mickey Kaus, in his book *The End of Equality*, suggests that we simply get rid of welfare, replacing the "underclass culture's life support system" with the offer of sub-minimum wage jobs for all who are "able" and willing to work—including single

mothers with children. Those who *aren't* willing to work will just have to survive without money, relying on soup kitchens and homeless shelters; their children will end up in orphanages. (Kaus assures us, like some latter-day Herbert Hoover, that "nobody would starve.")

What Kaus forgets is that work (if it is of a sufficiently menial sort, as so much of it is) can be as destructive to dignity as idleness. It is true that the central problem of the underclass is the lack of jobs—that the inner cities have been left stranded, over the last several decades, as jobs have fled to the suburbs. But not *any* job will do. Kaus, like many among the more comfortable members of society, may find satisfaction and fulfillment in his work; single mothers flipping burgers at McDonald's may not be quite so fulfilled. When "underclass" youths denounce the low pay of the degrading jobs available to them as "chump change"—the poverty pundits never tire of repeating this phrase, for them the ultimate indication of a willful indolence—they are, in fact, in their own way, asserting a certain dignity.

It goes without saying that such an impulse, unless channelled in a properly political way, may simply lead (as it does too often today) to a self-defeating nihilism—to drugs, gangs and crime, to all the familiar curses of the poor. Such behavior is rightly condemned. But the impulse behind such behavior does not itself flow from nihilism; in the refusal to accept the confines of the status quo we should see, rather, the potential for hope.

The conservatives are right about one thing: we on the left need to speak more, and more explicitly, about dignity. Glenn C. Loury, the black neocon, is right when he argues that "the pride and self-respect valued by aspiring peoples throughout the world cannot be the gift of outsiders," and that "neither the guilt nor the pity of one's oppressor is a sufficient basis upon which to construct a sense of self-worth."

But Loury is wrong to argue that anyone—black, white, or whatever—should simply ignore the effects of past (and present) discrimination, and even more wrong to assume that "if we are to be a truly free people, we must accept responsibility for our fate even when it does not lie wholly in our hands." Why? It is not improper for someone who has faced injustice to demand redress; such a demand hardly reflects a poor sense of self-worth or an abdication of responsibility.

Over the last few years, conservatives have expended considerable energy (and have shown a certain crackpot creativity) in their attempts to redefine the notion of "victimhood" in such a way that no one but the most extravagantly oppressed (and most obviously "innocent," that is, quiescent) victims count as legitimate recipients of public sympathy (not to mention public funding). In *A Nation of Victims*, for example, conservative polemicist Charles Sykes argues that "genuine victims" face their greatest dangers not from oppression but from "bogus victims" moving in on their turf. Rather than attempting to honestly weigh the claims of those who have, indeed, been victimized, Sykes argues that

we should instead just declare a “moratorium on blame”—a convenient way to simply avoid the subject altogether.

If conservative thinkers have seized upon the notion of responsibility with an opportunistic fervor, liberals and leftists have fared poorly, to say the least, in their attempts to incorporate the notion into a broader “communitarian” agenda. Amitai Etzioni, a leading communitarian thinker and the author of the recent manifesto *The Spirit of Community*, argues (like Sykes) that the discourse of rights needs to give way to a discourse of responsibilities.

The progressive side of Etzioni’s critique is his denunciation of Reaganite greed; beyond that, though, his critique is hard to distinguish from that of the moralists on his right. Like the conservatives, he believes that social justice derives, first and foremost, from the moral responsibility of individuals “to help themselves as best they can”; responsibility to family, and to the broader community, comes second. And, as sociologist Charles Derber has pointed out, Etzioni’s communitarian vision is strikingly blind to the question of power: “Etzioni ... seems to suggest that if we simply resolve to recharge our moral sensibilities and reform our families, schools and political campaigns, we will not have to attend to the explosively divisive issues of economic transformation.” Even worse, Etzioni’s pleas for an inclusive politics are belied by his contempt for ordinary working people, whom he dismisses in large part as small-minded bigots, “less progressive than Ronald Reagan [and] only a bit more ready for communitarian economics than the Chamber of Commerce.”

More broadly, and with a notable lack of personal modesty, Michael Lerner has attempted (in the pages of *Tikkun* and elsewhere) to promote a vague and vacuous ideological concoction of social and moral responsibility he calls the “Politics of Meaning.” The goals of Lerner’s movement are certainly ambitious enough: he hopes that “over the course of the next two decades” he will be able to insinuate his “values-oriented, psychologically and spiritually sensitive approach” into “every area of contemporary thought and activity.” It’s not clear, though, that anyone would notice if he did; there’s precious little meaning to the Politics of Meaning. Lerner’s philosophy—an attempt to “deeply address the human needs for love, connection, meaning and purpose in a humane way”—manages to be both trivial and pretentious at once, as if one could provide “meaning” to life by simply repeating the word like a mantra.

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politics.***

Like his rhetoric, Lerner’s specific policy recommendations lean heavily on the power of symbolism, and range from the meaningless (he asks Clinton to “create a new public discourse of caring, social responsibility, idealism and commitment to ethical, spiritual and ecological sensitivity”) to the silly (he suggests that every congressional district hold a yearly contest to determine the 20 families that have “produced children who were, by age 18, the most loving, caring, honest, responsible and supportive people in their communities”). Lerner supports workfare, and though he declares himself against “alienated labor,” he derides those who “talk about workers’ rights without talking about their responsibilities as well.” When faced with the specter of “irresponsible” workers, Lerner (uncharacteristically) turns stern: “The economy is not a bottomless cookie jar for us to reach in and remove goodies whenever we want.” Most of us figured that out a long time ago, thank you.

But if Lerner has had his problems with the philosophy, he’s had a notable success with the promotion: in April, Hillary Rodham Clinton delivered a speech drawing heavily on Lerner’s rhetorical invocations of caring and community. But there was an interesting slip that took place during the transit of Lerner’s ideas from the page to Hillary’s lips: Lerner called, you may recall, for “an ethos of caring and social responsibility.” Hillary called, instead, for “a new ethos of individual responsibility and caring.”

It wasn’t just the order of the phrases that Hillary reversed; she changed the adjective as well—and by extension the political meaning of her call for meaning. There’s a world of difference between those two adjectives—*social* and *individual*—though Lerner (like most liberals) appears not to understand (or even to have noticed) the crucial shift.

This is a perfect example of why the liberal invocation of responsibility has been so unsuccessful. Unable to distinguish between individual and social responsibility (or unable to recognize that the difference is important), those on the left hope that vague talk of values will be enough to offset the moralistic onslaught on the right. Unless liberals (and, more properly, those on the left)

are able to articulate a vision of social responsibility that goes beyond cliché, and to talk about personal dignity without giving in to the illusions of *laissez-faire* individualism, all the newly popular talk about responsibility will merely help to grease the further slide of liberalism to the right. *That* would be irresponsible. ◀

WHO'S RESPONSIBLE?



Get tough

O

The mayor of Minneapolis argues that the current welfare system needs radical reform.

By Donald M. Fraser
MINNEAPOLIS

Over the course of his 38-year political career, Minneapolis Mayor Donald M. Fraser has established solidly progressive credentials. As a state representative, U.S. congressman and national chair of Americans for Democratic Action, Fraser has fought hard on behalf of the disenfranchised, whether low-income Americans or human-rights victims in other nations. But his recent position on welfare reform has earned him such slurs as "poor-basher" and "sexist"—and has even caused critics to compare him to "family values" demagogue Dan Quayle.

Why the controversy? Fraser, the current president of the National League of Cities, has come to believe that the current welfare system is "destroying our families" by creating a culture of irresponsible parents. The editors of In These Times feel that Fraser's argument is worth our readers' attention. We asked him to write the following article.

nce the debate on health care is finally resolved, welfare reform is likely to be next on the national agenda. Unfortunately, most of the current proposals offer little hope for solving the most serious of the current welfare problems: the lack of support for children.

Welfare, officially known as the Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) program, provides federal funds, administered by the states, to help children living with a parent or relative who meets a state-established standard of need. The program—

which was begun under the Social Security Act of 1935 and expanded in 1962—serves about 4.8 million households. It has long been criticized for creating a culture of dependency among the poor. In recent years, many states have begun providing training and support to enable parents to become self-sufficient. These efforts have been reinforced by recent federal legislation. Success, however, has been only modest.

Nonetheless, the Clinton administration is now proposing a two-year limit on assistance, after which recipients would be forced to find work. If no private-sector job could be found, some form of government employment would have to be created.

City officials are apprehensive about this approach for two primary reasons. First, they would be confronted with the need to create jobs for thousands of people who have ended their two-year spell on welfare. And second, Clinton's proposals do nothing to change the aspects of the current system that discourage

two-parent families.

A lot of people don't like talking about the collapse of marriage and family in America. The issue raises uncomfortable questions about class, race and sex, about morality and responsibility. But we can't afford to hide from the facts. When I became mayor of Minneapolis in 1980, for example, 27 percent of the births in our city were to unmarried parents. Thirteen years later, an estimated 50 percent of the births are to unmarried parents, and the numbers continue to climb. In some neighborhoods these figures run to 80 or 90 percent.

The numbers are highest in some of our minority communities, but the rate of growth appears to be higher in the white community. The rate of illegitimacy is currently running about 25 percent among whites—about where the African-American community was in the early '60s.

What do these statistics mean? We're not completely sure. The amount of research into the causes and effects of single-parent families is meager, given the importance of the issue. But experts generally agree that, everything else being equal, children are better off in a two-parent home.

True, some single parents raise wonderful children. But too many young people are placed in double jeopardy: not only do they grow up in poverty, but they also suffer from a poverty of nurture and support. And children who grow up with inadequate support and with low expectations have trouble in school and are more likely to become

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Single mothers at a transitional living center in Chicago.

entangled with the law. For the children, this often means wasted and prematurely shortened lives. For city residents and officials, it means higher crime, higher police costs, more social disorganization and a less productive workforce.

The current welfare system encourages fathers to walk away from the families they have helped start. They can justify this avoidance of responsibility on economic grounds: with only one parent, the children can become eligible for AFDC benefits.

Thus, the father can comfort himself with the thought that his family will be better off without him around. And if he's paid at minimum-wage levels or is an irregular earner, he is correct in that assessment—especially since low-paying or part-time jobs rarely offer health insurance.

Research by William Julius Wilson confirms that marriage rates are higher among men who earn higher wages. But the employment situation for the urban poor is only worsening. Blue-collar jobs are disappearing; the jobs that remain offer ever-lower wages. And the minimum wage has not kept up with the growth of national income. It's ironic that the increasing failure of two adults to join in a household where their earnings could be pooled comes at precisely the time when that partnership is most needed. Separation only intensifies both parents' poverty and lessens their ability to give support to children.

Yet the Clinton administration's proposals could actually serve to *increase* the number of single-parent families. A single mother would receive counseling and skill train-

ing, and would be put on a track that leads to a job—not necessarily a good-paying job, but still a job. It might be hard to convince that woman she would be better off with a husband—since being with a husband would mean being without training and employment. Under the Clinton plan, women might see a child as the ticket to the job market. The father would once again be left out of the picture.

True, a woman who is able to become self-sufficient would likely provide a better home environment for her children. But without a second adult in the household, the woman would find it extremely difficult to be a good mother while at the same time trying to hold a job on a minimum income. Again, the big losers would be children.

But there is a way to restructure our nation's welfare system so that it encourages two-parent families and helps those families to a secure economic future. It would mean drastic reform. The basic idea would be to eliminate the AFDC as we know it, and to split the current welfare system into two pieces. Under this system, the federal government would be responsible for helping to support children in lower-income families, and states would provide the additional help that some families need.

In practical terms, this would mean integrating federal support for children into the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC), a program designed to encourage breadwinners for

Continued on page 21 (after insert)

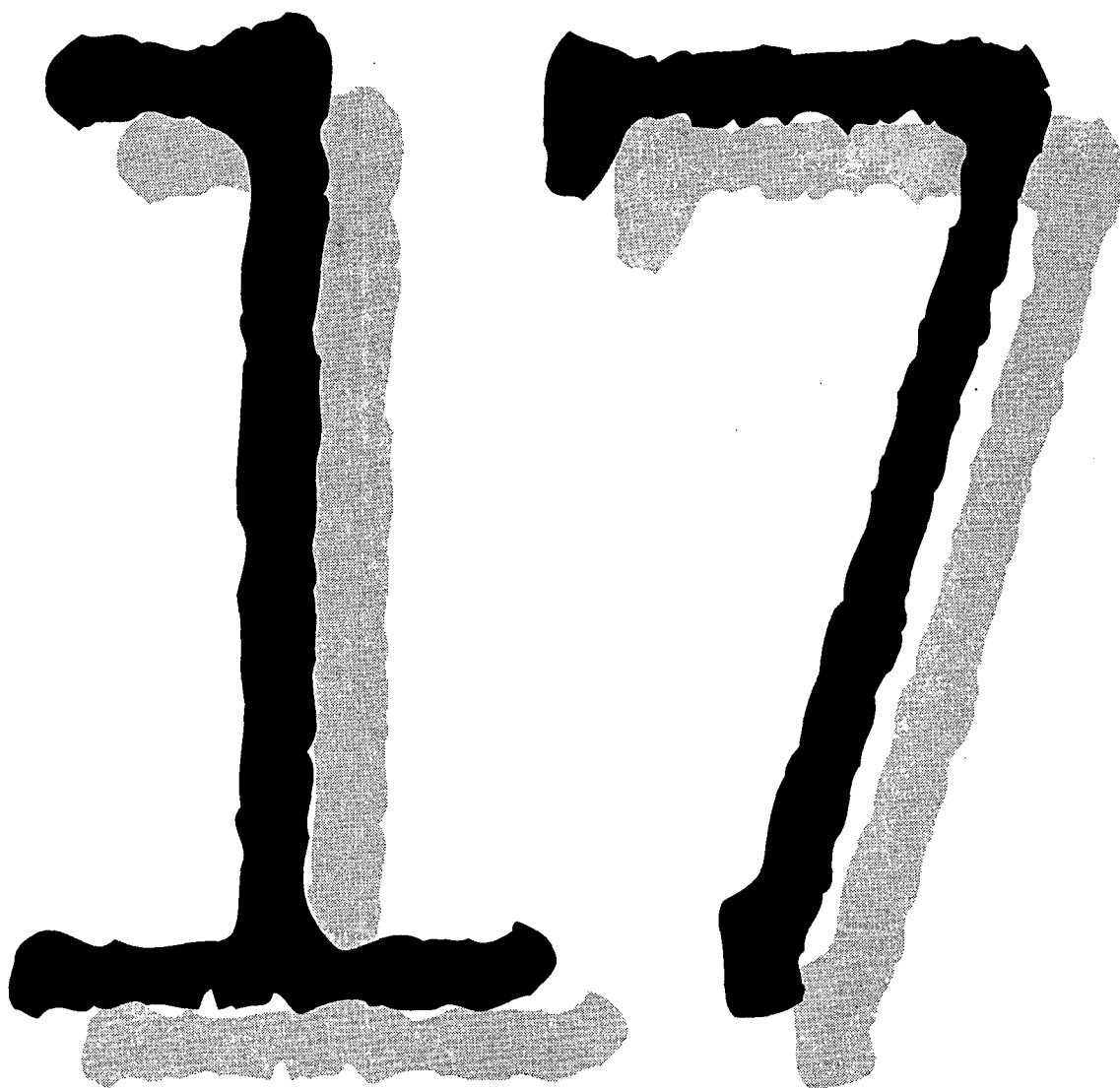
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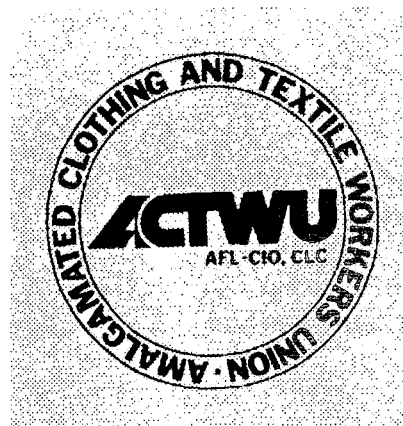
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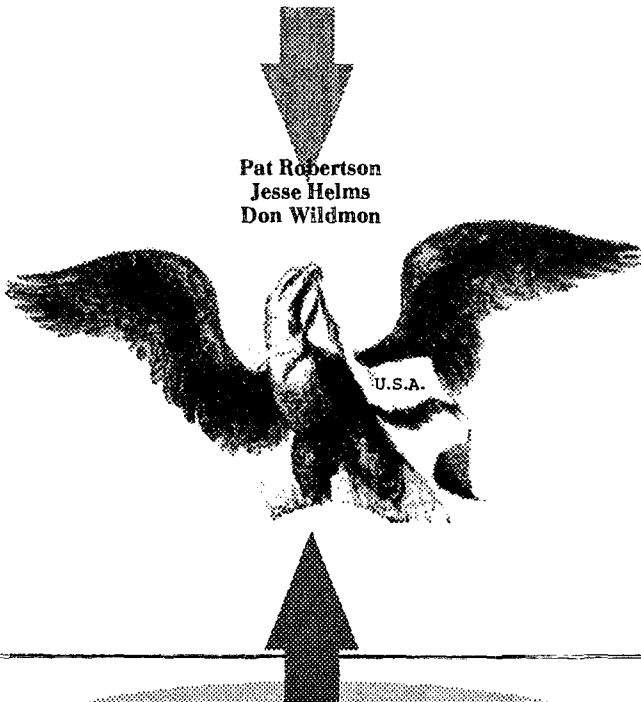
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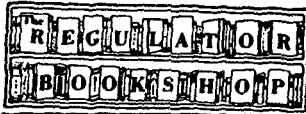
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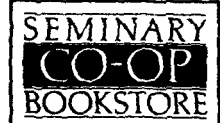
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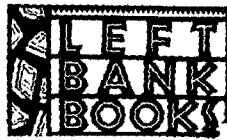
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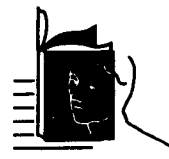
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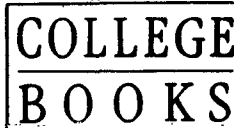
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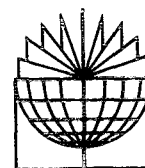
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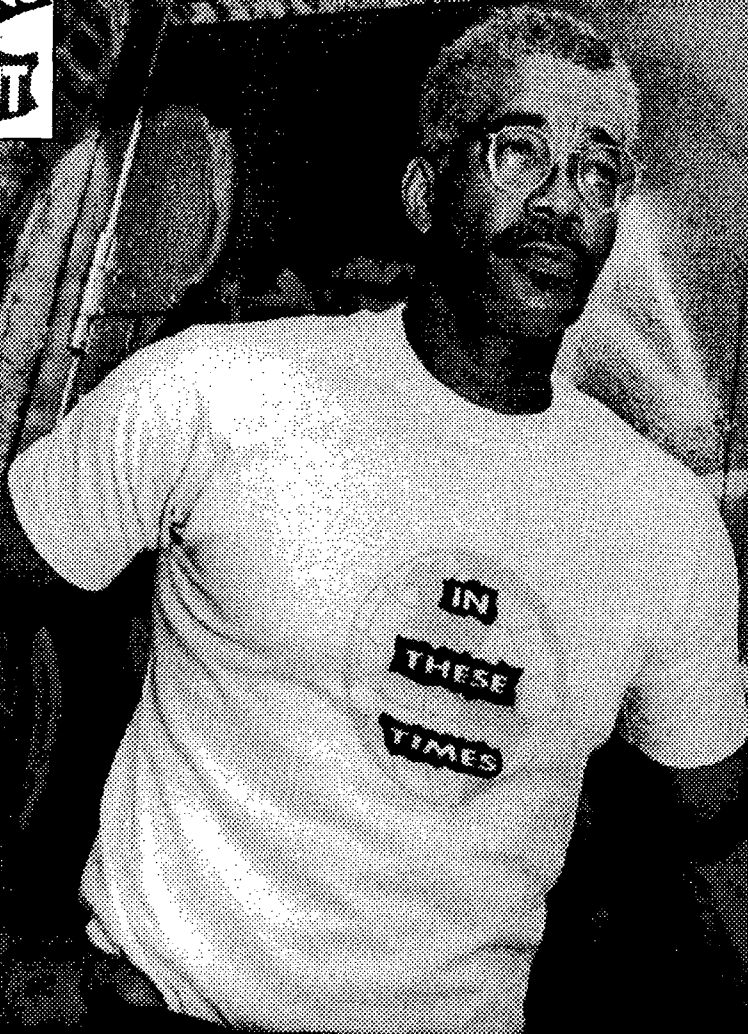
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Photo by David Schulz

Continued from page 20

poor families to stay on the job.

The EITC is a refundable tax credit for working families that have a small income and have at least one child living at home. Eligible workers can receive the EITC in one of two ways. They can get the full credit amount at the end of the year when filling out their income tax returns, or they can ask their employer to adjust their withholding.

My proposal would work like this:

- All low-income families—one-parent or two-parent—would receive a monthly cash grant from the federal government for each child. The stipend would cover the actual increased expenses that raising a child entails. It would be an entitlement, and the family would not be on welfare.

- If someone in a household is working, the cash stipends would be treated as advance payments on EITC credits. Adjustments would be made when the recipients file income tax returns. As a household's income grows, the EITC would eventually serve as a cap on child payments.

- States would supplement these federal stipends, but state assistance would be discretionary and would be based on family circumstances and available options, including school, work or community service. The goal would be to leave single women neither better nor worse off for having a child—ending, as *Saint Paul Pioneer Press* columnist D.J. Tice puts it, “single motherhood as a sort of meager career path.”

- Sliding-fee child care would become a federal entitlement, available to all families whose income is too low to

pay the full costs of child care. This reform would have the secondary effect of increasing wages for workers in child care. A long-term goal of the proposal would be to give a parent the option of receiving a child-care payment if he or she elects to stay at home during the early years of that child's life.

My proposal is still in the development stage. More investigation is needed, for example, to determine the fiscal trade-offs and the costs to the states and the federal government. But the basic premises of the program are far more rational than the current system.

The proposal would provide the same modest help with child-rearing to all needy families, thus eliminating any economic benefits a woman might get for having a child out of wedlock. Poor men would again be needed as a key part of the family structure. The plan also places the federal government in the position of favoring the healthy development of children.

I believe that a basic overhaul of the welfare system along the lines I have suggested would be supported by the American public. This overhaul would also be a big plus for the Clinton administration's efforts to “re-invent” government, since it would represent a clean break from what is widely regarded as a failed welfare policy.

The proposal would require a major change in direction in Washington. Unfortunately, there's little evidence that such a change is possible in today's political climate. Our children deserve better. ▲

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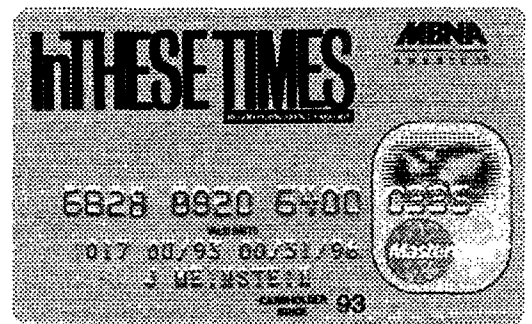
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WHO'S RESPONSIBLE? 

Suite crimes

W

ho could possibly oppose "responsibility" and favor "irresponsibility"? As Lee Iacocca might say, it's a "no-brainer." Politically, it's easy enough to oppose teenagers dropping out of school, getting pregnant at age 14, and shooting their neighbors randomly.

Yet most current advocates of responsibility who focus on urging the poor to be more upright and less of a problem to the rest of us offer an extremely truncated moral vision. We may reasonably ask people to be responsible—but we need also to explain to them what they should be responsible for, and to whom they should be responsible.

It is necessary but not sufficient for them to follow the laws and to do what they can to take care of themselves. Being responsible means caring about others around you—family, neighbors, fellow workers

or anyone else that your actions may affect. It means being socially concerned and accountable, willing to own up to the consequences of one's actions.

If a young man fathers a child, then it is not unreasonable to expect him to support and nurture that child. There is little argument about that proposition. Yet if a corporate executive makes a decision to close an inner-city factory—a move that will make it more difficult for many young men to support their children—he is likely to be applauded as a wizard of corporate restructuring and rewarded with bonuses of millions of dollars. If he can get the same work done in Mexico for one-tenth the labor cost, he's simply a shrewd businessman.

Who will denounce him as irresponsible? In the Candidean world of free-market economics, his pursuit of narrow self-interest ultimately produces public good. Why not see the runaway father's narrow self-interest in the same entrepreneurial light?

The rampant irresponsibility of many individual Americans is largely the product of a culture dominated by corporations that are themselves systematically irresponsible, except to their shareholders—and often not even to them. Capitalism of yore assumed that the owner of a business was in some sense responsible for that enterprise, even if his power was used ruthlessly and against the social good. Now most owners have a distant, contingent and often fleeting relationship to the corporation—as blocks of stocks, options on stocks, or even financial futures based on the stock market are rapidly, incessantly traded. These investors don't want to take responsibility for business even in the conventional capitalist sense.

America has always been an extremely individualistic society, but the individualism of the yeoman farmer or mechanic assumed a vision of a relatively egalitarian, democratic society resting on a base of hardworking, independent producers. In practice, there were also many forms of cooperation and mutual support. The contemporary consumerist culture—built up over the past century with credit, advertising, assiduous marketing and the creation of identities through purchases—breeds a much narrower, self-obsessed individualism. At most, the consumer's responsibility is to pay the minimum balance on the credit card bill.

The general culture reflects the irresponsibility at the top. In terms of values, it is not clear that much of the middle and upper middle class is so much more morally responsible than the poor. Is profiting from the revolving door between business and government morally superior to resorting to welfare?

Members of the upper middle class have more opportunities and more money, but that is not entirely a result of their being more responsible. Likewise, the limitations placed on

Individual irresponsibility is encouraged by corporate irresponsibility.

By David Moberg



©PETER HANNAN

the poor are not all a result of their being irresponsible. If there is proportionately more social irresponsibility among the poor—and given that charitable giving as a percentage of income tends to be greater among the poor, that's not immediately evident—we can find it simultaneously understandable, unfortunate, undesirable and inexcusable.

The gross irresponsibilities of some of the poor—especially street crimes—are more immediate and comprehensible menaces than the suite crimes of some corporate executives. In both cases, it is possible to explain the actions of individuals in large part by looking at the social and economic forces that shape their lives—and still expect them as citizens and moral agents to take responsibility for what they do with their lives. But, unlike the irresponsible poor, the executive or owner of a corporation often can escape legal responsibility for his actions, hiding behind

the corporate shield.

If we really want to make people more responsible, we must start with the most powerful influences on society. In recent years, we've witnessed auto companies calculate the cost of lost lives from their faulty cars and decide it's cheaper to kill innocent people than to redesign their vehicles. We've seen a pharmaceutical company market a drug for animals to humans and jack up the price a hundredfold. Corporations, often with taxpayer assistance, have closed plants and fled overseas to politically repressive regimes. Though workers have the legal right to organize and act collectively, corporations typically do everything they can—including breaking the law—to crush the faintest sign of workplace democracy.

Three-fourths of manufacturers in 1991 made no effort to prevent pollution and reduce toxic chemical usage, according to a recent study of toxic waste releases by the Citizens Fund, the research arm of Citizen Action. "Companies talk a good game about preventing pollution," Citizen Action environmental director Ed Hopkins says, "but when it

comes to actually doing something, pitifully few take any responsible action."

Corporate irresponsibility has its immediate harms—unsafe or unaffordable products, dangerous or alienated work environments, unemployment and growing inequality, ravaged urban centers, widespread pollution. Yet it also sets the tenor for society: political democracy is deeply corrupted and the idea of a social compact becomes laughable. Why should workers be responsible when their bosses aren't? Why should the poor be responsible when their legislative representatives aren't?

When Bill Clinton began campaigning, he talked about the need for a new social covenant, about responsibility from corporations as well as from workers and welfare recipients. But in office, the Clinton administration has shown little stomach for demanding corporate responsibili-

ty. True, taxes on the rich were raised. But the revenue from those tax hikes was committed to reducing the debt and making the bond traders happy, not to public investments that might lead to jobs.

Clinton did not lay the groundwork for a social covenant when his administration negotiated a labor side agreement to NAFTA that did not protect the right to organize unions. Citizens were not encouraged to assume more responsibility when Clinton's Environmental Protection Agency permitted the operation of a hazardous waste incinerator near a school and homes in East Liverpool, Ohio, even after it had failed government tests.

Writers Richard L. Grossman and Frank T. Adams, advocates for both the environment and workers, argue that Americans must resurrect an old political tradition to insure greater corporate responsibility. In a recent pamphlet entitled "Taking Care of Business: Citizenship and the Charter of Incorporation," Grossman and Adams observe that corporations operate on the basis of charters that are granted by state governments. In the early 19th century, citizens demanded strict definitions of charters. These terms included limits on the length of a charter and clauses reserving the right to revoke it. There was widespread distrust of corporations, which were seen as threats to democracy and to working people.

During the late 19th century, as corporations increased their influence over state legislatures, the states "gave corporations limited liability, decreased citizen authority over corporate structure, governance, production and labor, and ever longer terms for the charters themselves," Grossman and Adams observe.

Far worse, the courts began to expand corporate privileges: judges gave some corporations the right to take private property with minimal compensation. Courts also eliminated jury trials to determine harm and damages from corporate actions. And through the doctrine of "the right to contract," judges stripped legislatures of much of their powers over corporations. Moreover, the courts reduced corporate liability, and the liability of individual corporate officers, and gave management the power to stop civil rights at the plant gate.

In 1886, the Supreme Court ruled that a private corporation was a natural person with the same rights as an individual under the Bill of Rights or the 14th Amendment, which guarantees due process under law. Courts began to rule that many laws took corporate property without due process, a line of argument recently expanded by the free market "law and economics" ideologists. They argue that virtually any federal social or regulatory legislation, including most of the New Deal and its legacy, represents unlawful "takings" of private property.

Grossman and Adams argue for a new movement to challenge the charters of corporations that have demonstrated social irresponsibility. Community groups have in recent years used bank charter laws and, in particular, the provisions of the Community Reinvestment Act, to challenge the

expansion plans of banks that have miserable lending records to minorities and poor neighborhoods.

Despite some remaining state charter laws that open interesting political opportunities, Grossman and Adams' idea would be best pursued by demanding national chartering of corporations. More than a decade ago, Ralph Nader promoted a Corporate Democracy Act as part of such national chartering. Corporations, he argued, should be forced to abide by broad responsibilities to workers, communities, the environment and to the well-being of the national economy if they are to be entitled to any privileges—including the right to exist.

Greater corporate social responsibility is essential for any significant increase of individual responsibility to society. Contrary to the holy text of irresponsible competition, both the experience of many successful national economies and recent theoretical work even in economics demonstrate that cooperation and social responsibility can improve national economic performance. If there is a growing clamor for more personal responsibility, then reasserting society's power to create and control corporations is the responsible move to make. ◀

For a copy of Richard L. Grossman and Frank T. Adams' "Taking Care of Business: Citizenship and the Charter of Incorporation," send \$4 plus 52 cents postage on a self-addressed business envelope to Charter, Ink., P.O. Box 806, Cambridge, MA 02140.

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WHO'S RESPONSIBLE?



The home front

A

***Officials want
to give public
housing
residents in
Chicago better
role models.
But the
residents
want real
empowerment.***

**By Christopher
Chandler
CHICAGO**

battle shaping up over the future of Chicago's notorious Cabrini-Green Housing Project may have important implications for the future of public housing nationwide.

On the surface, the conflict centers on two sometimes-differing concepts of how to give public housing residents more responsibility for their homes and their lives.

Vincent Lane, chairman of the Chicago Housing Authority (CHA), wants to tear down six of Cabrini's high-rise public housing buildings, as part of a federally funded \$50 million redevelopment plan. The scheme would replace the six buildings with low-rise market-rate housing, of which 25 percent of the units would be set aside for current residents. In later phases, more of the com-

plex's 26 high-rises would come down, he says. Residents would be given a choice of moving to scattered-site housing across the city and suburbs or moving into new units reserved for the poor in private housing to be built in and around Cabrini.

Lane is trumpeting the plan as a way to break the cycle of poverty within CHA projects. The new development is part of the CHA's Mixed Income New Communities Strategy (MINCS). The program is based on the notion that low-income public housing residents are unable to help themselves because they have no role models.

The national average income of non-elderly public housing residents is \$7,000, according to the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). MINCS aims to break this culture of impoverishment through "a return to social and economic diversity in the resident population," as CHA publicity materials put it.

The CHA's first test of MINCS came at Lake Parc Place on the city's South Side, where welfare recipients and low-income working residents have lived side-by-side in a restored, privately managed complex since

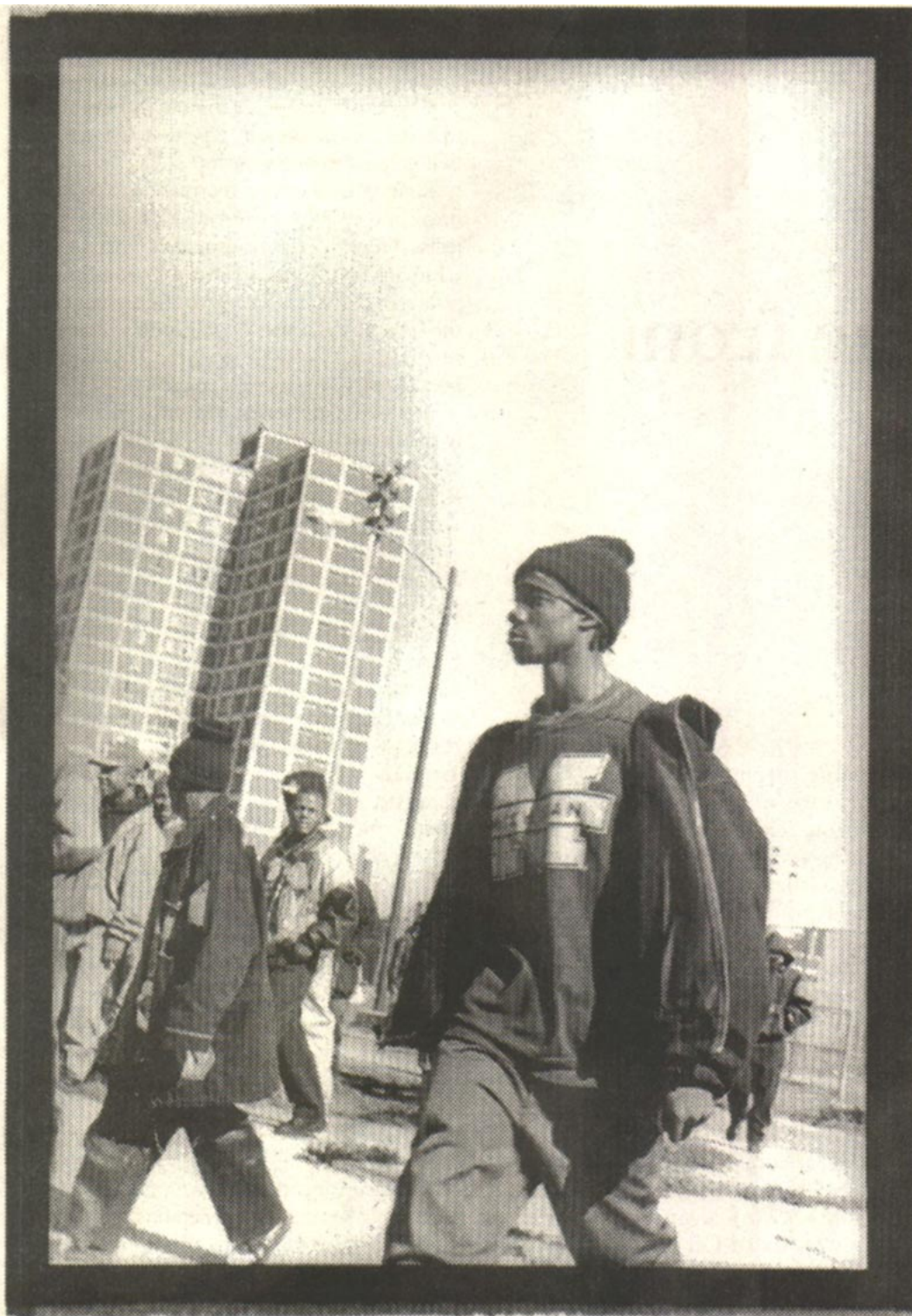
1991. "The presence of working men and women in Lake Parc Place has provided a role model for other residents and has led to a dramatic increase in the number of employed persons who had previously been unemployed," according to CHA literature.

But many residents at Cabrini-Green have no interest in role models. They want empowerment. A council of the 51 presidents of tenant-management associations, representing the entire 6,935-resident project, is developing its own master plan for the area. The group wants tenant management, and, as the law now provides, tenant ownership after three successful years of management. The council also wants day care, health facilities, private businesses on the first floors and economic development projects to bring jobs to the area.

In fact, tenant-management corporations around the country have been remarkably successful at generating collectively owned businesses, which have often led to jobs for residents.

And the residents realize that the Cabrini-Green land is worth a fortune. Just east is Chicago's Gold Coast—the most affluent part of the city. Just southeast is the Loop, and Chicago's chic North Michigan Ave. shopping area. To the north is the rapidly developing Clybourn corridor, with its upper-middle-class attractions. It would not be hard for tenant owners at Cabrini-Green to make money, even if it simply involved leasing land or owning a share of private development, as tenant owners in St. Louis have done.

Developers have, in fact, been drooling over the Cabrini land for decades. And that's exactly what makes residents



Young men at
Cabrini-Green.

"The developers are after the land, that's why," she concludes.

She is incensed because HUD has just turned down her organization's request for funding and recognition as tenant managers. To date, HUD has refused to explain the rejection.

HUD Secretary Henry Cisneros has, however, signalled his support for the CHA plan. Cisneros says it mirrors his own policy—but it's a little unclear which policy he means. One of Cisneros' public housing policy initiatives is the Moving to Opportunity program, which "relocates families from public housing developments to housing in areas where poverty is less extensive," according to a HUD press release. But another Cisneros initiative stresses "involving residents in the public housing decision-making process and encouraging tenants to have a strong role in the management of public housing."

Cisneros says he will not actually grant the \$50 million in HUD money until the plan is approved by two African-American members of Congress from Chicago, Democratic Reps. Bobby Rush and Cardiss Collins. But the

suspicious of CHA chairman Lane's plan. "Why is it that they're only talking about tearing down public housing here at Cabrini and the lakefront properties [Lake Parc Place, near the affluent Hyde Park area on the South Side of Chicago]?" asks Josephine Trotter. Trotter is the newly elected president of the tenant-management corporation for the Cabrini extension, which contains 18 high-rise buildings—including the six slated for demolition.

two lawmakers are under heavy pressure to go along with the plan. Both city newspapers have endorsed it, and the *Chicago Tribune* went so far as to lambaste Rush and Collins for organizing a public hearing on the issue, suggesting in an editorial that they were engaged in "a cynical effort to exploit the fears of public housing tenants."

The *Tribune* had good reason to fear a hearing. When Rush and Collins held a forum at Cabrini November 13,

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the crowd of some 400 tenants unanimously opposed the plan, starting with the top elected officials of the Cabrini Advisory Council.

Collins concluded the meeting with this pledge to the tenants: "I shall be your voice. I stand with you now." But Lane indicated to reporters after the meeting that he would still pursue his plan. Or, he warned, there would be no plan at all.

One political problem facing the tenants is that tenant ownership is seen as a Republican strategy. It was President Bush's secretary of housing, Jack Kemp, who pushed through the law allowing tenant ownership. Likewise, it was Tory Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher's government that sold off much of England's public housing to residents. But Kemp's bill was supported by progressive Democrats, including the Congressional Black Caucus.

And there's nothing Republican about the tenants at Cabrini-Green. What they want is a chance to control their own neighborhood.

"We've been working with an architect to show some of the things we could accomplish," says Ken Hayes, vice president of the proposed Cabrini extension resident-management corporation.

"We will have trees, orchards, crops of corn," he says. "We will link the buildings with second-floor corridors and high-tech transportation."

Others talk of rooftop restaurants with a view of Lake Michigan, cooperatively owned supermarkets, tourist boats on the Chicago River—a prosperous African-American community in the heart of Chicago.

The economics of tenant ownership seem promising for the residents. The mortgages on these buildings have all been paid off long ago. Rents paid by tenants would seem to be more than sufficient to pay for operating expenses—although under CHA central management it has been hard to see where that money goes.

In fact, the one high-rise building in the complex that has full tenant management already shows what can be done: the building is well maintained, neat and secure, and occupancy is much higher than it was under CHA control.

"You can see the difference between the buildings we manage and the ones CHA runs," says Cora Moore, manager of the building at 1230 North Burling that has full management, and vice president of the overall Cabrini tenant group.

"Lane should have sat down with community leaders instead of just com-

ing up with a plan by himself," she continues. "Instead of tearing those buildings down, they should be talking about fixing them up. They have been neglected for a long time."

Residents concede that the issue is not strictly racial. Most white city residents would not oppose ownership, and Lane himself is African-American. But, as Trotter notes, he is also a private developer.

"I don't hear anybody talking about tearing down the Robert Taylor Homes," Trotter says, referring to the largest and grimmest high-rise public housing development in the country.

"As they say, when they discover oil on the reservation, they move the Indians," she says.

Trotter's reference to Indians seems particularly apt in Chicago, whose first permanent settler was Jean Baptiste Pointe DuSable, a mulatto trader from Haiti who had to flee the area, not because he was black but because his wife Catherine was Indian and the white man's policy at the time was to clear out the Indians. Now the time has come, it seems, to clear out black people from one affluent area of Chicago.

Is this the "model" that Cisneros should use as public housing tenants in all our major cities apply for management and ownership?

Christopher Chandler has been a journalist in Chicago for 30 years. A former press aide to late Mayor Harold Washington, he has been active on housing issues since 1966.

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U R B A N P O L I T I C S

Over the rainbow?

Urban liberalism runs aground on the shoals of race and racism.

By Salim Muwakkil

If the results of last month's city elections didn't hammer the last nail into the coffin of urban liberalism, they at least stapled the lid shut for the time being. Electorates in many urban municipalities stepped further away from the liberal traditions that have characterized those cities for most of their national lives.

The trend hasn't gone unnoticed. Virtually every mainstream journal has published some variation on the "death of urban liberalism" theme. One of the most influential of these analyses was Jim Sleeper's pre-election piece in *The New Republic* heralding "The End of the Rainbow."

Sleeper argued, much as he did in his insightful book, *The Closest of Strangers: Liberalism and the Politics of Race in New York*, that the Jesse Jackson style of "black rainbow" politics had reached a point

of diminishing returns in the nation's largest city. For him, the oxymoron "black rainbow" signifies a mode of identity politics that "deepens racial and other differences in the name of respecting them, in the zero-sum game of urban governance."

He argued that politicians adhering to this old style of governing, like outgoing New York City Mayor David Dinkins, cling to antiquated notions of racial victimization and fail to read the writing on the wall about the need, born of recession, for a fiscal restructuring of municipal governments. Sleeper, who is also a columnist for the *New York Daily News*, charged that rainbow politicians' habit of "crying racism" has long alienated white ethnics and now is losing favor among voters of all colors.

His take on November's election results has been adopted by the national media and has settled into the conventional wisdom. But there are some problems with Sleeper's analysis. First of all, his dismissal of rainbow politics is based primarily on the growing levels of resistance to its mission of achieving social

justice; the alternatives he proposes seemingly discount that mission as unrealistic.

It is this austere, *Realpolitik* vision of governance that has provoked the activist chant, "No justice, no peace." Sleeper's postulate that a new breed of black and white politicians are coming to the fore—practicing something he terms "Rainbow II," pushing a pragmatic program that eschews identity politics while embracing a common civic identity—is faulty.

Sleeper's Rainbow II scenario is a tactical adjustment rather than a political elaboration on (Jesse) Jacksonian liberalism. The expanding numbers of the ghetto poor, those seething inner-city denizens who loom so menacingly in the national psyche, will not vanish simply because disillusioned liberals have decided to ignore them. While the economic contractions of the '90s may be constraining the options of urban policy-makers, no programmatic design to address the severe crisis they face has yet emerged.

True, streamlining bloated bureaucracies and pruning extravagant labor pacts are positive by-products of the current fiscal crunch. But many other features of this new, purportedly more pragmatic, approach to urban governing leave much to be desired. For example, Sleeper applauds Rainbow II politicians' rejection of race-based politics and victim-oriented social welfare programs because he believes these approaches exacerbate class and color warfare. But such a rejection is not automatically a progressive move; it needs to be contextualized within the country's racist history.

Many of those heralding these shifts in urban politics curiously are de-emphasizing the paler complexion of the newly elected mayors. But it is surely more than coinciden-

cal—Sleeper calls it “ironic”—that the black mayors who once reigned in Los Angeles, Chicago and Philadelphia, as well as in New York City, were displaced by white mayors espousing more conservative doctrines. Perhaps the reluctance of these analysts to spotlight the racial transformations in the mayors’ offices is due to their denial that racism is a component of this new urban pragmatism.

It’s certainly not the only component. Exposing politicians who camouflage their policy weaknesses beneath “blacker-than-thou” postures is a worthy undertaking. Many African-Americans are attracted to aspects of black nationalist thought and some candidates exploit that attraction with demagogic appeals to race loyalty. But those “cross-over” black politicians who adopt more politically moderate and racially conciliatory positions to increase their appeal among white voters are too often responding to electoral imperatives rather than to ideological commitment or even utilitarian ideals.

For example, many black analysts attribute Dinkins’ loss to his reluctance to include black nationalists in his campaign. “Dinkins was absolutely too afraid of alienating Jewish and other white voters,” says Jitu Weusi, chair of the Brooklyn-based group, African-Americans United for Political Power. “So his campaign played it safe and stayed away from the kind of grass-roots leadership that would have helped him win.”

Clearly, there is an ongoing crisis among the black leadership, a predicament aggravated by the larger society’s turn away from ideological liberalism. The chasm between the ambitions of black elected officials and the needs of their urban constituents has widened in recent years, causing many young African-Americans to be scathingly critical of traditional leadership.

And since black candidates seeking further electoral inroads must broaden their appeal to attract white voters, many find themselves in a “damned if you do, damned if you don’t” dilemma. But it is misguided to interpret this disarray as some grand rebuke of the compensatory strategies liberals push as effective ameliorative measures.

Tough talk on crime is another feature Sleeper identifies as common among this new school of urban politicians. Some new-style black politicians may join with this current breed of

urban pragmatist in taking tougher stances on the problem of crime, and indeed, crime is the No. 1 issue in most African-American communities. But to endorse the macho rhetoric of the “lock-’em-up-forever” school of conservatives like Virginia’s governor-elect George Allen Jr. is to ignore the devastating effects these incarceration-oriented policies have had on the African-American community in recent years.

Some of these new black elected officials are attempting to forge new space between the competing modes of governing



David Dinkins

that Sleeper has tagged Rainbows I and II. Norman Rice, the black mayor of Seattle who generally is thought of as a new pragmatist, was easily re-elected in a contest against a rabid crime-mongering candidate. And this re-election came at the same time that a ballot initiative requiring three-time felons to be locked up for life passed statewide.

In cities where the percentage of African-Americans is low, politicians have not lost affection for the old-style liberalism, Sleeper’s analysis notwithstanding. Sharon Sayles Belton, the black female mayor-elect of Minneapolis, for instance, is as Rainbow I as they come. This suggests that whites in the larger cities reject liberalism because they perceive it as a pro-black threat rather than an ineffective style of government.

In an overall political calculus, however, the resistance of the white electorate is an important factor to be considered. It is also worth considering whether the true epitaph of urban liberalism will be written on the same tombstone that heralds the death of the American city. ◀

CHINA

Taking the plunge

E

verywhere in urban China, people with professional skills or good connections are, as the Chinese phrase it, "wading into the sea." With China's economy in the midst of a boom, they are rushing to make money in any way they can.

Despite an economic boom, capitalism "with Chinese characteristics" is leaving many high and dry.

By Jonathan Unger
BEIJING

Some have plunged in head-first, quitting their state-paid jobs. But most prefer to hold on to their official posts to safeguard their salaries, subsidized housing, health care and pensions, while moonlighting even during working hours. In Beijing, only eight out of the 35 senior researchers at one of the state's major social science institutes are still bothering to do any research. All of the rest have quietly disappeared into money-making ventures.

Up and down the professional scale, even those who have not yet taken the plunge talk excitedly about one possible scheme or

another. These opportunities are defusing the dissatisfactions that drove much of this class to join the 1989 Tiananmen Square protests. What had appeared as intolerable corruption in the '80s—when Chinese officials and their kin stood practically alone in padding their private bank accounts—now seems more tolerable as the opportunities for padding spread to include a wider segment of the population.

Not just individuals, but state enterprises and government offices are becoming involved in commercial plunges. To rake in "extra-budgetary" income to prop up the living standards of their staff, these institutions have begun setting up incongruously diverse undertakings on the side. The Sichuanese restaurant in the neighborhood where I am staying looks like a private business, but it's actually a joint venture between Sichuan province's steel corporation and my local Beijing district government. China's Public Security Bureau (that is, the ministry of police) owns a popular garden restaurant in the embassy district. The last three cabs I've

hailed were owned, respectively, by the Bank of China, the city gasworks and the Chinese Sports Commission.

On a larger scale, some government organs are making a killing by speculating in real estate and by opening import-export firms. The officials who set up these schemes take a certain percentage for themselves, and some have become quite rich. The distinction between private and public in such matters is becoming increasingly blurred.

Not everyone is quite so happy about capitalism "with Chinese characteristics." Recently, the central and provincial governments, caught with leaky systems of taxation and very tight budgets, have begun shortchanging schools, hospitals and government bureaus—arguing that these public institutions can always start their own businesses to cover revenue shortfalls. In these circumstances, institutions that try to stay honest—or do not have the power and opportunities to do otherwise—have to improvise to stay afloat.

A high school teacher from the city of Tianjin reports that his school of 1,000 students has had to turn part of its premises into a street-front store and to coax its students to shop there in order to make the teachers' payroll. In addition, the school has opened a laundry service for hotels, a small spare-parts factory and a fast-food noodle eatery at the main train station. A dozen of the teachers, including several of the best, no longer do any teaching; they've been assigned full time to manage the fledgling enterprises.

Institutions that are unsuccessful in turning a profit on the sidelines suffer the consequences. At the Chinese Academy of Sciences in Beijing, scientists have been told to hand in to the academy each year an amount greater than their annual salaries if they want continued access to their laboratories, telephones and other facilities. Rather than carry on with

their normal scientific research, they are now obliged to seek out consultancies with plastics factories and the like. A scholar with the academy's history of sciences department, whose expertise is not in high market demand, laments that he is hard pressed to come up with the monies demanded by the academy. "In the '80s, I pushed hard in magazine articles to put the economy on a strictly market footing," he muses. "I never guessed I'd personally be paying the consequences."

Workers from industries that are unable to compete in the new market environment are similarly losing out. All of the workers aged 45 or over at a number of Shanghai's textile mills have recently been forcibly retired on minuscule pensions; many have become street hawkers to make ends meet. In Tianjin, some troubled factories simply stopped paying pensions—until retirees organized themselves and angrily petitioned government offices.

Despite the economic boom, many blue-collar workers with full-time jobs are growing concerned and impatient. With the economy overheating and with inflation in the cities at 20 percent and climbing, most employees who do not have the skills to moonlight have seen their real wages fall.

But the problems go beyond inflation. A series of editorials in the Communist Party's newspaper, *People's Daily*, in May of last year endorsed a strategy of pay cuts and reduced benefits in the bulk of the state-owned factories so as to create a leaner and more competitive industrial sector.

The cumulative effect is a palpable divide opening between those in a position to make fast money and those who aren't. In 1989, popular anger was directed almost wholly against the government; now resentment is growing against those who crowd expensive restaurants, treating friends to feasts that cost more than an average person's monthly pay. The government may have co-opted many of the people who have special skills and connections by allowing them to make good money, but it is alienating others in the process. The most recent government policies take scant account of popular perceptions of fairness.

Nowhere is this clearer than with regard to education. Most urban Chinese, middle class and working class alike, are firm believers in equal opportunity in education. In the past, entry to higher education was free, including living expenses. But recently the state has begun imposing higher tuition charges, aiming to make university fees ultimately cover the full costs of higher education. Already many parents whose children have fought their way through the highly competitive entrance examinations are finding that they cannot afford the new charges. Soon university educations will largely become the preserve of the children of the new capitalists and less-than-honest officials. Similar trends are putting decent health care and new housing beyond the reach of ordinary people.

Resentment over the new inequality is not yet strong enough to put the government in any immediate danger. With the economic boom, enough people are making good money to dilute the potential for mass protests. But the current economic overheating may well lead to a recession



within the next couple of years, and if so, many of those who are now taking a plunge will find the going harder. Even now, they have no particular commitment to the government, and many of them could again turn into critics and potential protesters. The 1989 protests erupted during the last economic downturn. Expectations of improved living standards grew rapidly during most of the '80s and then soured during 1988-89. This made the high-handed corruption of the party leadership seem all the more galling.

The Chinese government survived in 1989 in part because there was no alternative ideology waiting in the wings. Had the government not panicked and launched the Beijing massacre, the protest movement would likely have petered out of its own accord.

Not much has changed. If anything, the intellectuals and students and ordinary people are even less certain as to what they might want today than they were in 1989. The recent economic and political troubles in Russia and Eastern Europe seem to many Chinese to confirm the dangers of replacing a party regime with a weaker central government and Western parliamentary reforms.

In short, many urban Chinese today prefer to see a strong authority in control—which is what they are getting. Come the next recession, there seems little chance that any renewed bout of Beijing protests, even if these somehow succeeded in toppling one or more unpopular leaders, would change much in China.

Jonathan Unger is head of the Contemporary China Center at the Australian National University. His most recent books are *Chen Village Under Mao and Deng* (with Anita Chan and Richard Madsen, 1992) and, as editor, *The Pro-Democracy Protests in China* (1991) and *Using the Past to Serve the Present: Historiography and Politics in Contemporary China* (1993).

I N T H E A R T S

Smothering Heights

**Jane
Campion's
The Piano, a
tale of erotic
love amid
Victorian
repression, is
a triumph in
feminist
cinema.**

By Pat Dowell

For the last two decades, feminists have wondered how the arts would change as women took a greater role in shaping them. How would movies, say, be different, and how would they portray the difference between men and women, when women took the helm?

Well, Hollywood still doesn't know. But out there in the wide world, women have been making movies this year that defy description—Sally Potter's historical carnivale, *Orlando*, for one, and now Jane Campion's postmodern gothic romance, *The Piano*.

Campion is a white New Zealander whose family came as settlers from Scotland more than a hundred years ago. In *The Piano*, a story she began to write in 1984, Campion concocts a startling 19th-century heroine, Ada, who comes to New Zealand in the 1850s

to be the wife of a man she's never met.

Ada, played by Holly Hunter, has been mute since the age of 6, and she has an illegitimate daughter named Flora (Anna Paquin), a fierce and devoted little girl who often speaks for her. Ada's other voice is her music. She plays haunted melodies of her own devising on a piano that she has toted all the way across the globe, only to see the heavy awkward instrument left standing on the wild beach. Her new husband, Stewart MacGrath, thinks the piano far less vital a possession than her cookware and clothes.

This thankless role of a repressed and oblivious man goes to Sam Neill, who is overshadowed in the cast by his co-stars Hunter and Harvey Keitel, two of the unlikely performers ever to be cast (or to cast a spell) in a Victorian love story. Keitel plays Stewart's neighbor, George Baines, a Scot who has been fraternizing with New Zealand's native people, the Maoris. George even sports a fetching set of facial tattoos, which are a constant reminder of his link with the rich, weirdly beautiful native state of

the rainforest, which these prim Victorians seek to rule.

It is a landscape of eerie, universal green, shading into deep, sucking mud. The sun seldom breaks through the heavy mossy canopy. Campion has said she imagined it looking like the bottom of an aquarium, and it has just that sodden otherworldliness. The settlers try to ignore it, slogging through the organic debris in their crinolines, insisting that Ada wear fragile lace for a wedding portrait posed in a torrent of rain.

These symbolic gestures—this cultural frontline against the sensuality of the place—fall largely to the women of the settler community. They are the purveyors of repression and fear of the physical, and Ada doesn't fit in with them.

Oh, she's strictly corseted and properly inhibited when she arrives. But her music is a wild, intimate refuge from the blank wall of the settler psyche. They know it and reject it as music that "creeps into you," and George falls in love with her through it. He bargains with her husband, trading land for the piano and a set of lessons from Ada. But once he carts it to his cabin and she reluctantly begins, George wants to trade her back her piano in exchange for sensual liberties to be taken while she plays.

Thus begins an allegorical awakening of this woman.



The Piano
Directed by Jane Campion

Photos courtesy of MIRAVAX Films



She comes to her sexual senses just as George eventually comes to his spiritual senses. She negotiates at first under the coercion of her desire to resume her art: being with George is the only way she can play her piano. In a uniquely erotic set of scenes, George proceeds to offer her a black key or two at a time in return for being allowed to touch her arm, see her stockinged legs, or caress her. He is in love, however, and eventually throws over the bargain and returns the instrument because he recognizes the corrupting power of his transaction with Ada.

It is then that real passion erupts in them both, and tragedy begins. Stewart will find them out and take revenge, dear reader, following the melodramatic lines of the brilliantly re-imagined Emily Brontë gothic that *The Piano* is. Those distinctly female evocations contained in 19th-century novels by women, of the sensual prison of Victorian life, have never really come to the screen until now, and never with the veil of physical and political inhibition removed. Campion has cast a new, eerily beautiful light on the sexual politics of the gothic, and she has plunged the story even deeper into sexuality's twin, the creation of art.

This mute woman's relation to her piano and her music is plumbed with endless variations. Her art is her voice, her accomplished self, and her salvation. It conducts her to physical passion, but also serves as her surrogate life. In it, she finds refuge and an anchor, one that very nearly takes her to the bottom of the sea in the film's penultimate scene, when she appears to have escaped Stewart's clasp at last, only to find her weighty piano too much for the Maori canoe that takes her to a new life.

Nothing about *The Piano* is ordinary, but one element doesn't rise startlingly above cliché—the group of Maori people nipping at the edge of the story. The settlers employ native servants and farm workers, and they negotiate with tribal elders for the purchase of land. Though the Europeans have tried to disguise the Maoris' aboriginal difference in dresses and suits, their facial tattoos and unabashed candor about sex and other European taboos provides a constant, irrepressible interruption to the resolute repression that shapes most of the settlers' relationships.

Campion clearly sees in them a people still attuned to nature, at home in their bodies in a way the settlers are not. They are playful, but not children, as they angrily tell Stewart when he tries to pay them for land and services with buttons and other glittery gewgaws. Nevertheless, like so many people of color in sympathetic movie portraits, they are the repository of all the warm, juicy emotions that civilization has wrung out of the settlers—it's still a stereotype, just the post-'60s version of the noble savage.

As Ada awakes to her own sexual desires, the Maoris invade more of the story—rushing to the stage to stop a murder when the settlers put on a play that features the wife-killer Bluebeard, moving into George Baines' house, playing the piano when nobody's home. They function as the return of the repressed—interrupting the settlers' lives as sexual passion flows into the unstable triangle of Ada and George and Stewart. Even Campion—who can imagine almost anything, as this movie attests—can't imagine real Maoris who exist as something other than vessels for white society's problems. That's for the next millennium, I guess. ◀

IN PRINT

A shut and open case

By Pete Karman

After 30 years of undying controversy, the only thing that everyone who knows anything about the death of John F. Kennedy on November 22, 1963, agrees about is that a minute or so after the fatal shots were fired in Dallas, Texas, at 12:30 pm CST, Lee Harvey Oswald popped a nickel into the soft drink machine on the second floor of the Texas School Book Depository building and got himself a Coke.

Was Oswald merely washing down his lunch, or had he just scampered down from the sixth floor after shooting the president of the United States? If he was the shooter, did he act alone? Was he a demented outsider or an insider turned patsy?

As things stand, a third of a century later, outsiders believe Kennedy's murder was an inside job, while insiders dismiss the outsiders as deluded. The outsiders consist of the great majority of the American people (some 77 percent, according to a 1992 CBS/New York Times poll), along with most sentient humans in the rest of the world. The insiders comprise a small but powerful coterie of top-level politicians, media heavies, cops, spooks and related national security types—the group, in other words, that the outsiders believe to be most likely to harbor those responsible for the conspiracy, or the cover-up, or both.

The aura of mystery still surrounding the president's death has produced an apparently unending boom of public writings on the homicide—more a condo than a cottage industry. These writings fall for the great part into three broad and overlapping categories: detective stories, fabrications and soap operas (the latter the form most favored by insiders). Unfortunately, only God and selected insiders have seen the vast trove of secret material on the JFK assassina-

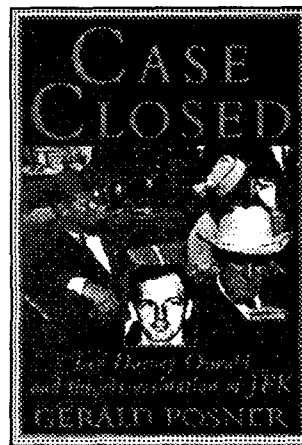
tion, which, if the continuing classification of papers on the Abraham Lincoln killing is any indication, is likely to be locked away forever by the government.

All but the soap operas start with the premise that there's more to the case than the official line: that, in what amounted to random and discrete bolts of lightning, ex-Marine Lee Harvey Oswald alone shot Kennedy—for no good reason—and then (just as mysteriously) was killed by gangster Jack Ruby alone—for no bad reason.

The best of the detective stories rely on traditional investigative tools to try to show that the Warren Commission report, the bible of the official line, is, in effect, a work of anti-mystery fiction. Whereas mysteries follow the evidence anywhere it leads to discover *whodunit*, works in the anti-mystery genre declare *hedunit* and then proceed to ignore or stamp out evidentiary trails that lead elsewhere. Not surprisingly, crime-savvy Americans haven't bought the hedunit story, apparently because it doesn't square with what they know from fact and fiction about cops and killers.

The outsiders attack the official line on two broad fronts, challenging the Commission's manipulation and suppression of physical evidence, as well as its methodical discounting of Oswald's and Ruby's personal histories, laden with intrigue and sinister associations. They also wonder why the murder of the century was accompanied by the most inept murder investigation of the century.

Why, they ask, is there no record of Oswald's interrogation? Why was Kennedy's autopsy so badly botched? Why, after 30 years, has not one test been able to reproduce the performance of the alleged murder weapon or the ability of its so-called "magic bullet" to do massive damage to



Case Closed: Lee Harvey Oswald and the Assassination of JFK

By Gerald Posner
Random House
607 pp., \$25

Deep Politics and the Death of JFK

By Peter Dale Scott
University of California Press
333 pp., \$25

The Man Who Knew Too Much

By Dick Russell
Carroll & Graf
824 pp., \$27.95

Who Shot JFK?

By Bob Callahan
Illustrated by Mark Zingarelli
Fireside/Simon & Schuster
160 pp., \$12

bone and tissue yet remain pristine? And why, if the assassination was a case of simple murder, is so much of the evidence still an official secret?

One of the best works in the detective story genre is *Accessories After the Fact*, the recently reprinted landmark work by the late Sylvia Meagher, which pulverizes the Commission by pointing up its inconsistencies, omissions and false trails. Meagher long ago achieved near saintly status amongst assassination researchers for her diligence in producing the first index of the 26-volume supplement to the Commission report, as well as for her own sober and careful investigations.

There are a wealth of solid accounts in the detective genre. Books by Anthony Summers, Henry Hurt, Jim Marrs, as well as Robert Groden and Harrison Edward Livingstone, provide comprehensive and readable narrative accounts of the assassination, with the former widely regarded as among the most definitive and the latter particularly good on photographic evidence. David Lifton's *Best Evidence* is a painstaking guide to the mangled and apparently altered autopsy findings. Philip Melanson's *Spy Saga* provides a brief and brilliant portrait of Oswald, who, Melanson finds, was no pathetic loner but a fascinating character whose short life was packed with exotic circumstances and anomalous associations. Seth Kantor's *The Ruby Coverup* does a similar job of fleshing out the thin and uninquiring Ruby biographies promulgated by the insiders.

Among the better recent additions to the still-growing stack is Dick Russell's *The Man Who Knew Too Much*. A massive effort, encompassing 17 years of research, the book revolves around Richard Case Nagell, a CIA contract agent, and his efforts first to thwart a purported JFK assassination plot and then, failing that, to remove himself from the conspiracy. There are lots of loose ends here, but the book provides a wealth of corroborative citations, offering a knowledgeable and nuanced description of the highly charged political atmosphere of the early '60s.

With masses of evidence either destroyed or locked away, and with the insiders unable to make a strong case for Oswald's singular guilt, conspiracy theories have proliferated. In response, the insiders have not so much challenged the theories themselves as they have ridiculed the very idea of a conspiracy.

Of course, conspiracy is nothing more or less than

agreement by two or more persons to commit crime. Though the U.S. is the most notoriously crime-ridden of the modern industrial states, the insiders maintain with straight faces that conspiracy is alien to America, and all but unknown at the highest levels of wealth and power. Therefore, those who entertain the possibility of conspiracy in events such the Kennedy homicide are deluded or mischievous. This is, clearly, a self-serving argument, aimed at closing off inquiry; it has, rather, encouraged further suspicion and further questioning.

A few works come right out and make specific accusations. Mark Lane's *Plausible Denial* blames a CIA-led conspiracy for the murder of Kennedy. His vehicle is a Florida libel suit filed by ex-CIA operative and Watergate burglar H. Howard Hunt, who charged he had been defamed by accusations in a small right-wing magazine linking him to the assassination. Lane, a lawyer, defended the magazine in court and, marshaling a wealth of evidence, won the case. "We were compelled to conclude," the jury forewoman commented, "that the CIA had indeed killed President Kennedy."

Though the CIA is the usual suspect in conspiracy theories, it's not the only one. Other works give different weightings to various official and private groupings said to have been involved either directly or by way of acquiescence.

Some of the conspiracy theories seem too neat, and too contained in their scope, to be fully believable—in effect, they're seen as part of the cover-up. G. Robert Blakey and Richard Billings's *Fatal Hour*, which

indicts organized crime for the hit, is regarded by many within the community of assassination researchers as the outline for an official fallback position in the event of a collapse of the Commission, putting added heat on the next most likely suspects.

The thicket of JFK conspiracy theories is dense but passable. Newcomers to the genre may find a guide of sorts in *Who Shot JFK?*, a recent book by Bob Callahan and illustrator Mark Zingarelli that provides concise and informative summaries of the major plot lines, along with a good deal of fascinating additional information about the assassination. In many ways it's the best and most accessible beginner's book.

Those with good knowledge of the case will find that *Deep Politics*, Peter Dale Scott's newest work, offers perhaps the most useful synthesis yet of this particular skein of



Mark Zingarelli/Who Shot JFK?

history. Scott rejects the mechanical notions of "shadow governments" and secret cabals promoted by some of the cruder conspiracy theorists, exploring instead the long-established ties amongst various official and private power centers and their ability to achieve consensus in matters such as the removal of a national leader.

Scott's book is one of the rare few on the subject that bridges the gap between events on the surface and what he calls deep politics, that is, the behavior over time of institutions with the power to function beyond the constraints of legality. He doesn't indict likely culprits; rather, he helps us to comprehend the hidden underside of America's global political economy, with its huge, ongoing trade in money, militarism, narcotics and state power. Scott's brilliant, meticulously detailed lesson is, in a way, as much a guide to the current Iraqgate scandal as it is to the assassination.

The weedpatch of JFK fabrications grows mainly on TV exposé shows and in quickie books. The exploitative dross of the assassination field, they consist in great part of Mafioso memoirs, belated recollections by purported witnesses and gotcha tales by cultists and spooks aimed at discrediting particular countries, groups or individuals by tying them to the murder. Many of them, such as the recently ballyhooed remembrances of a woman who claims to have been Lyndon Johnson's mistress, contain interesting but often unprovable information.

Finally, we come to the soap opera version of the JFK homicide. This genre was first realized by an extraordinarily well-connected writer on intelligence subjects named Priscilla Johnson MacMillan. Jack Kennedy knew her in Washington and she knew Oswald in Moscow. She was permitted to become the chronicler of both Marina Oswald and Stalin's daughter Svetlana Alliluyeva whilst those women were sequestered by our government. Lane, in *Plausible Denial*, charges MacMillan with planting evidence in the JFK case.

Her book, for its part, steers clear of matters forensic and concentrates instead on those domestic. It assumes that

Oswald was the lone assassin and proceeds to find reasons appropriate to a script of *The Young and the Restless* for his mad and impulsive crime.

The latest soap entry and the current great whitewash hope of insiders still peddling the hedunit version is Gerald Posner's heavily flogged *Case Closed*. Adoringly received by the establishment media, it's the most ambitious effort yet to present a prosecution case against Oswald and no one but. As I write, armies of conspiracy-oriented researchers are busily tearing its arguments and evidence apart, their refutatory articles already beginning to appear in the JFK trade press.

Their work shouldn't be too difficult. A main weakness of Posner's book is that, to make its argument, it had to create a magical world in which all of Oswald's countless intelligence connections were accidental, benign or meaningless. Posner repeatedly assures readers that still secret files contain no interesting material. And, ignoring the Cold War, he finds it normal that a Marine who had publicly professed communism and defected to the USSR, where he married the ward of a Soviet secret police colonel, should on his return draw not interest but rather aid from official Washington and from a fascinating assortment of Russian and Cuban anticommunist exiles and spooks.

Posner, for his part, does pay a good deal of attention to the forensics, relying, for example, on the sort of computer modeling of trajectory tests that might impress those who have not yet learned the old computer adage: garbage in, garbage out.

Still, for all of its pages of loose ballistics tests and elastic anatomy demonstrations, *Case Closed* remains an effort at psychological accusation. Like MacMillan's book, upon which it is heavily dependent, Posner's work plays down or dismisses Oswald's intriguing career moves and immerses itself in his marital woes and what we are told was his brooding and confused inner life. Oswald, says Posner, carried out the assassination because he was a nut case.

The insiders have relied for 30 years on such soaps and anti-mysteries to convince Americans that there's less to the JFK assassination than meets the eye, that conspiracy is a foreign notion, that power is benign, and that to believe otherwise is to be a nut. A veritable library of much serious and some merely meretricious research challenges this nonsense at every turn.

Why does it matter who killed JFK? The easy answer is because it's a terrific mystery. The hard answer is that if Lee Harvey Oswald was not alone, then America is not being governed by its elected politicians but by hidden forces and powers, such as those we've seen operating over the years in Vietnam, Watergate and in the current Iraqgate scandal. The real question to ask, then, is more fundamental: are our votes and our Constitution worth more than the nickel Oswald stuck into that Coke machine? ◀

Conspiracy-a-go-go

The Warren Commission Report, 1992, Marboro Books
Accessories After the Fact, by Sylvia Meagher, 1992, Vintage Books
Conspiracy, by Anthony Summers, 1992, Paragon House
Crossfire, by Jim Marrs, 1989, Carroll & Graf
High Treason, by Robert Groden and Harrison Edward Livingstone, 1990, Berkeley
Reasonable Doubt, by Henry Hurt, 1986, Holt, Rinehart & Winston
Spy Saga, by Philip H. Melanson, 1990, Praeger
The Ruby Coverup, by Seth Kantor, 1992, Zebra Books
Best Evidence, by David Lifton, 1988, Carroll & Graf
Plausible Denial, by Mark Lane, 1991, Thunder's Mouth Press
Fatal Hour, by G. Robert Blakey and Richard Billings, 1992, Berkeley
Marina & Lee, by Priscilla Johnson MacMillan, 1977, Harper & Row

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▶ PUBLICATIONS

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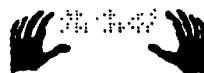
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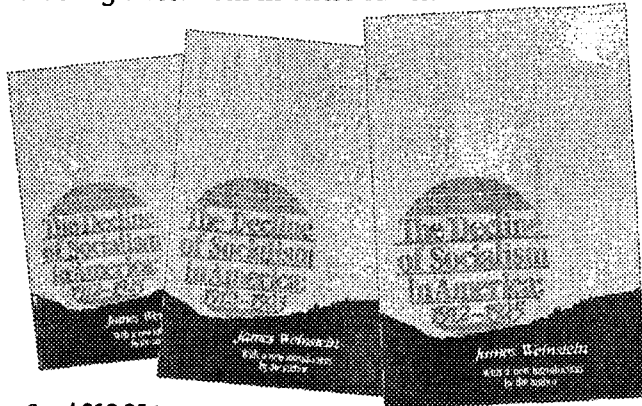


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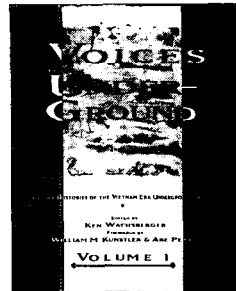


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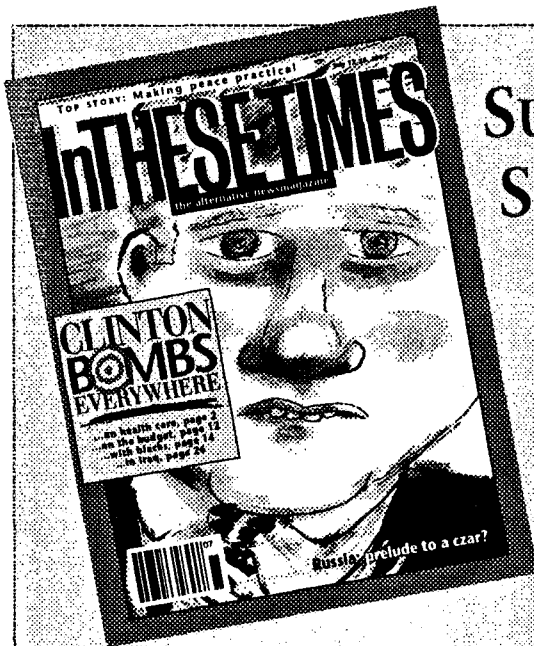


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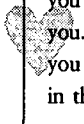
The Antioch College
Sexual Offense Policy

THE ART OF LOVE

When a boy wants to ask a girl for a date, there are several rules to follow and pitfalls to avoid. First of all, he invites her specifically for a particular occasion, giving her the time, the place, and the nature of the affair. He says, for example, "May I take you to the game in Hometown Gym at two next Saturday afternoon?" Knowing all the relevant facts, she has a basis upon which to refuse or to accept.



There is no set rule whether you should drink with a girl before making love. Ask the girl if she wants some wine, but don't think you can rely on the wine to do the trick for you. And don't drink so much yourself that you can't remember the various techniques in this book, or, worse, get it up. ... Years ago you might have had to get a girl drunk to get her into bed. These days she's eager to go and you want her half-sober when she gets there.



If the level of sexual intimacy increases during an interaction (i.e. if two people move from kissing while fully clothed—which is one level—to undressing for direct physical contact, which is another level), the people involved need to express their clear verbal consent before moving to that new level.

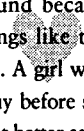


THE LANGUAGE OF LOVE

Conversation is something like playing tennis. The ball comes over the net toward you, and it is up to you to bat it back if the game is to go on. When ball after ball falls dead at your feet, the sport palls and interest lags. So it is with conversation. It is up to you to pick up the comments thrown your way and toss them back with enough bounce to keep the conversation going.



When you meet a girl that turns you on, right away you want to know something about her, right? Things like where she's from, what she does, does she have a lover already, does she really dig him or is he just around because she hasn't met you yet? Things like that. Well, girls are the same way. A girl wants to know something about a guy before she goes to bed with him. And what better source is there but you?



If one person wants to *initiate* moving to a higher level of sexual intimacy in an interaction, *that person is responsible for getting the verbal consent of the other person(s) involved before moving to that level.*

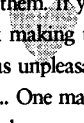


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Obtaining consent is an ongoing process in any sexual interaction. Verbal consent should be obtained with each new level of physical and/or sexual contact/conduct in any given interaction, regardless of who initiates it. Asking "Do you want to have sex with me?" is not enough. The request for consent must be specific to each act.

